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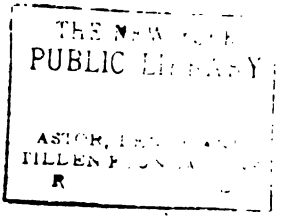
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MISTRESS JOY

A TALE OF NATCHEZ IN 1798 * * * * * * * * * *

BY

GRACE MACGOWAN COOKE

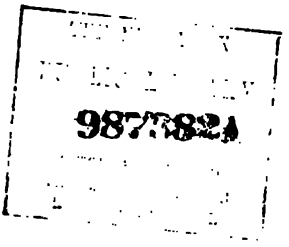
AND

ANNIE BOOTH MCKINNEY

NEW YORK

THE CENTURY CO.

1901



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TO THAT CHURCH IN AMERICA WHOSE FOUNDATION STONES
WERE LAID IN THE SOUTHERN WILDERNESSES OF
OUR COUNTRY BY MANY SUCH LITTLE BANDS
AS THAT OF MISTRESS JOY'S
FATHER TOBIAS

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THE WILDERNESS

MISTRESS JOY

PROLOGUE

"With Fate for oarsman, our lives do cross
some devious waves of Time in company."

IGHT was falling. To those in a canoe which slipped stealthily with the river toward the open, the hour and the scene held something sinister. But the three felt and expressed it differently.

"Dorothea has fallen from grace again, father."

The lips which uttered this solemn accusation were those of a little maid, a girl of seven. Her gray eyes were stockaded with a battlement of wondrous lashes, which threw a dusk, unchildish shadow on the childish face. She looked from the rag doll in her lap, whose derelictions she thus gravely announced, off to the westering sun, where it lay, a great hot eye, close to the earth. It glared upon them, red and menacing, and painted the way with unnamed, formless terrors.

The horizon was a black line drawn across low marshes, past which the mighty Mississippi wallowed in sinuous sluggishness, like some huge reptile uncoiling lazily.

The man at the prow, slender to thinness, a little stooped, his dark flannel shirt open at the neck, and a

big-brimmed hat shading the sharp-featured face of an ascetic, stared straight ahead. He appeared to be fifty, and was forty. The hands, resting on either side of the frail boat which moved, a helpless speck upon the broad bosom of the Father of Waters, were horny—the hands of one inured to toil; his eyes, gray like the child's, were speculative, mystical—the eyes of a dreamer, an idealist. Hers held the germ of a restless passion, the inquisitorial look of the worker, one who would be an arbiter of destiny.

Behind, immovable, inscrutable, crouched the Indian, his face down-bent, his form, despite the attitude of repose, lithe with the power of a reserve force ready to leap forth at demand. Without change of posture or glance, he gave, in response to the child's words, a guttural "Ugh!"

But the father turned gentle, kindly eyes upon her and the rag degenerate at her side, and, with a consolatory pat upon the shoulder nearest him, said dreamily: "Yes, little Joy, 't will all be right. 'T will come right, little daughter."

A look of impatience, almost anger, flashed momentarily in the black-lashed eyes. "How can it be right 'thout she repents, Father Tobias? An' she is very stubborn." But the man had again turned to the darkening stream and the level waste which stretched, unknown, illimitable, to the south.

The water, sullen, slothful, seemed scarce to move. It was as if all the glue that could be found in all the world had been unbottled and emptied into its channel, so dark, so slow, so difficult was the river which yet bore resistlessly on to the unknown.

Sedge-grass grew in colorless fringe at the water's edge. Cranes stood, gaunt and gray, among the reeds. Bats, like uneasy spirits, zigzagged against the crimson west, then dipped to the muddy stream with a whir

of featherless wings that sounded ominous on the evening peace. The silence was stirred, broken by the harsh, remittent croak of numberless frogs, which gave their concert in honor of the coming spring night.

And at the boat's end a man still looked toward the nearing south. A child, a glint of sunset radiance imprisoned in her deep eyes, busied herself with motherly cares. An Indian crouched, unseeing, yet vigilant. The river lapped, swayed, writhed, sluggish but sure. And night settled down on the strangers in a far country.

CHAPTER I

T was a low, sullen sky, which hesitated darkly between a promise of more rain and a threat of snow. The roads were unspeakable. The black, sticky soil, soaked by weeks of rain, clung to foot or wheel with rubber-like tenacity.

Six miles south, along the river front, a cluster of hills marked the site of Natchez. Perched on a high bluff, overlooking the silent river under the low-hung clouds, was a tiny cottage, with brilliantly firelit windows, which outward promise of comfort was well fulfilled by its interior. The spacious chimney-place held a roaring fire of great hickory logs. By this bright, shaken light an old man was bending his gray head over some books on a table.

A tall, lithe young girl, with a book propped open before her, was shelling corn, and incidentally feeding a pet or invalid chicken in a basket at her side. Her face was thoughtful, but with great possibilities of mirth in it, and occasionally she paused in the busy work of fingers, eyes, and mind to toss back her bright, rebellious hair, speak a comforting word to the fowl, mend the fire if it lagged a bit, or ask some question of the old man.

The third figure by the cheery fireplace, so impassive that it might have been taken for a part of the smoked and time-stained furniture of the little cottage,

was that of a tall old Indian; his slender, supple fingers had been busy polishing a deer-horn handle for a hunting-knife, but now they were folded over the work in his lap, and he sat gazing quietly into the fire.

Here were the three voyagers of twelve years before, in port. How comfortable a port, how safe, secure and desirable it appeared to the wistful eyes of the man who stood outside the window of the little cottage that dull autumn evening and gazed hungrily in!

He had come through the town and plodded over the little Methodist settlement near by, pausing now and then at some door, putting forth his hand to knock, then snatching it back with a gasp when he realized that he was entirely in rags and, for the first time in his life, without one penny in his pocket. His sorry shoes, of patrician cut and fine Spanish leather, were broken and almost dropping from his feet. As he looked in he shivered, and his teeth came together with a rattle.

He got the graceful outline of the girl's shining head against a background of shadow. While he gazed, her lips parted, and she began to sing in a sort of undertone, but very sweetly:

> "Return, O wanderer, return,
> And wipe away the falling tear;
> 'T is God who says no longer mourn;
> 'T is Mercy's voice invites thee near."

The words were those of a hymn quite unknown to the watcher without, but the mention of the wanderer and home brought tears of self-pity to his eyes.

The old man at the table lifted his gray head smilingly and joined a clear, sweet tenor with her fresh, young tones. Something in the man's benevolent countenance emboldened the wayfarer to knock.

When Joy opened the door upon the dripping figure

her father, calling from within, gave the invitation to enter.

"Good evening," said the stranger, removing his limp hat and showing a thin, haggard, handsome face. "I believe I have lost my way. Might I beg your hospitality until I dry my garments somewhat?"

"Enter freely, friend," returned the old man, simply. "There is no inn nearer than Natchez—you were seeking an inn, no doubt?" (The other smiled in grim, covert amusement.) "If you are willing to put up with our humble cheer, you are indeed welcome."

The newcomer thanked him briefly, almost haughtily, a manner in somewhat broad contrast to his attire and condition.

"We supped some time since," suggested Mistress Joyce. "Shall I not brew you a dish of tea, and set you out some meat and bread?"

Who but the spendthrift, come to that first time when he cannot fling largess abroad, but must accept the charity of those beneath him—the humble and thrifty poor—knows the sullen distaste for this simple kindliness which rose in the man's breast, and bade him answer brusquely: "Anything will do; I dined late."

Mistress Joyce, behind the stranger's head, made a little grimace, and shaped her pretty mouth into an interrogative "Oh?"

Her father smiled indulgently. He could never reprove Joy's light-mindedness as he felt he ought. The meal was set forth, and eaten almost in silence. When it was finished, "Draw up to the fire," invited the master of the house. "You will abide with us to-night, I 'm thinking. Hark!" He lifted his hand, and they heard the first heavy downpour of rain.

"Rains it this way oft here?" asked the man. "I suppose I should be grateful for any shelter from a

storm like that." And then, as his gentle breeding got the better of his black humor, he added: "I thank you, sir, and you, mistress, for your kind hospitality to a stranger whose appearance must certainly ill commend him."

"Nay," protested the elder, gently. "Matters of apparel and such-like be of the world, my child, and we do not judge as the world judges. God knows the heart, and God, not man, knows who is worthy."

And again that sarcastic smile played over the other's face. "God sees the heart, does he, mine host? Well then, faith, God sees some very sorry things." He looked at the old man's long, black coat, which resembled the cassock of a priest; at the clear, gray eyes, dome-like forehead, and silver hair, showing already the tonsure of age.

"I judge, sir, you are a preacher, belike a Dissenter, a—a—" he searched for a word—"this new sect of which I heard mention in the village."

"A Methodist," supplied the host. "I am Tobias Valentine, a humble servant of God, the pastor of a little flock of the faithful here in the wilderness, and glad to be of service to you if I may, sir. This is my daughter, Mistress Joyce Valentine."

His glance inquired the stranger's name, and, after some halting, the man volunteered, "I am generally called Jessop. I—I—have a name or two besides—one way or another. But I hold that a man who hath not two coats should scarce be so pretentious as to wear two names. Jessop will answer," and he fell to brooding, his dark eyes fixed on the coals.

Joy picked up her corn-basket with her fingers; then she picked up her father's wandering attention with her eyes, and took both into the little lean-to kitchen. When they were out of the newcomer's hearing, "Are you going to keep him?" she whispered, nodding her

head toward the half-seen profile of the stranger in the room back of them.

"I have asked him to stay, Joyce," said her father. "No man knows when he may entertain an angel unawares."

Joyce shrugged her shoulders. "An angel!" she echoed, with a little half-smothered laugh. "He looks an angel! Father Tobias, that is exactly what you said when you would take in the little Frenchman who stole the last one of the silver spoons."

"Nay," rebuked her father, "judge not, Joy. 'T is true the spoon was gone, but thou didst not see him take it; perchance some other needy soul filched it when thou wert from the cabin."

Joy caught the lapels of her father's coat, and kissed him vehemently. Her sole reply was, "O Father Toby, how I do love you!"

When Master Valentine went back into the room, he courteously refrained from reading, lest the stranger should feel himself neglected. But he might have spared his anxiety, for Jessop sat one full half-hour glowering into the fire and uttered never a word. Only the patter of the dropping corn—Mistress Joy had resumed her corn-shelling—the sleepy note of the chicken in the basket, and the crackle of the fire infringed upon the stillness.

Finally, "Are there many men of substance in this community?" Jessop inquired abruptly.

"Mine own people," returned Pastor Valentine, "are all thrifty, and we have absolutely no paupers, for we all work."

Jessop's uneasy pride flared up at this last clause, and he glanced about him haughtily.

"Concerning men of the class to which I take it you allude," continued the other, "there are Colonel Minor of Rose Alley, General Shields of Oakland, Daniel Bur-

nett, Jonathan Barnes, and Judge Bruin of Bayou Pierre. Judge Bruin is our nearest neighbor; his place is a mile to the north of us, on the river front."

"A mile," growled Jessop, "over these infernal roads! 'T is equal to ten anywhere in God's country."

" 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.' 'The earth is his, and the fullness thereof,' " chimed the preacher's clear voice, reprovingly.

"Humph!" returned Jessop. "When 't is such earth as this"—turning up the broken sole of one pitiful shoe —"I 'd far rather 't were His than mine."

"Young sir," said the preacher, after a pause, "all strangers and wayfarers are kindly entreated in this house, but while they are in it they must respect its ways. I am a preacher of God's word, and I do not like to hear any man take the name of God lightly upon his lips. 'T is now our hour for evening prayer. Will you join us?"

Jessop said neither yea nor nay. He chose to fancy himself affronted, and strove not to listen when his host began reading the story of the Prodigal.

Gentle Pastor Valentine! But for the man's defiant attitude, his heart had almost failed him to read such a story to this poor prodigal. The old man's voice had the heart-searching violin quality; these words of the Book were so familiar to him that he could have read them with closed quite as well as with open eyes, and no actor's training could have given greater power to the passage describing the degradation of the prodigal and his return to the father's love, than did the intonations of this simple preacher of a primitive faith.

It was as if the scene were actually present to those in the little cabin. They saw the father running forward to greet his returned son, and felt all the joy and blessedness of the conclusion.

It was well, perhaps, that Jessop's face was turned

away from the others. To his own immense surprise, he found himself following the words as though they were uttered to him, and to him alone. As the father of the prodigal ran forward to welcome his son, there arose before the mind of the prodigal sitting there the face of the stern old man whose heart he knew he had broken, and whose name he had disgraced.

" 'When he was yet a long way off,' " pursued the melodious voice, " 'a long way off—' " So far away! The tears stung under Jessop's eyelids, and he resented them. He was angry with himself, his host, the Book, and the story. He arose, pushing back his chair noisily. "In the name of the Lord, amen!" he cried. "Have you done your reading, my good sir? I am tired, and would to bed. I believe I have been dozing here."

Pastor Valentine looked at him without resentment. He was too old a fisher of men not to recognize one of those strenuous battling souls which fight against their own salvation. "I beg your pardon, sir," he responded gently; "you must indeed be weary, having come so far." (Again Jessop's teeth ground at the "so far.") "Joy, is the room prepared? Will you give the gentleman a light?"

When the stranger had gone, with salutations too elaborate to be sincere, into the small side room set apart for guests, and her father and Manteo had climbed the ladder-like stairway to their loft rooms above, Joyce set forth her own couch in the midst of her household cares. It was a snowy little bed, which by day folded itself up and masqueraded as a chest. She was a good housewife, this slender, impetuous, deer-like creature, and she stepped, with a serene face, lightly about the room, attending to the many details of a housewife's nightly duties. As she went to the hearth to rake the fire together and cover it, that it might keep until morning, she caught sight of the

man's handkerchief lying, a crumpled heap, on the broad hearth-stone. She picked it up, and, sitting down in the chair that he had occupied, smoothed it across her knee. It was old and tattered, but very fine. Joy had never had so fine a piece of linen in her fingers before. There was a wisp of beautiful lace clinging to one side of it, and a cipher embroidered in the corner.

She eyed it thoughtfully and somewhat wistfully. Everything beautiful and fine appealed to Joy, and set her dreaming of people who wore rich clothing and carried handkerchiefs such as this one had been in its youth. Her mind wandered off to her father. How kind and gentle he had been with the surly owner of this bit of cambric—quite too gentle, Joy thought. She shut her curved red lips, straightened them into a severe line, and tossed up her pretty chin aggressively. She would have told him what was what, when he began with his braggart airs. But Father Tobias was always so. His patience was as illimitable as the sea, and he loved all sinners, whether they were repentant or no.

Joy's zeal was of that fiery order which would fain have pommeled the unrepentant into salvation, and she had all a young enthusiast's objection to waiting while a sick and feeble soul learned to choose the right, rather than have the right thrust upon it.

"Ah," she thought, sighingly, as she pushed aside the curtain and looked out upon the rain-washed night, "Father Tobias must be right; it always proves so in the end. 'His ways are not our ways.'"

Then she knelt beside the little white bed, and prayed earnestly and long for the soul of the stranger who had called himself Jessop, adding a fervent petition for patience and grace to bear with the failings of others, remembering that she herself was an imperfect and a sinful creature.

CHAPTER II

OY had risen in one of her periodic furies of house-cleaning. It was now four days since the stranger's advent. At last the grace for which she prayed had been given her. But the newcomer's failings, his lumpish indolence, his neglect to mention any day for departure or state any reason for his remaining, stretched woefully thin the garment of charity in which she would have clothed him. It frayed at the seams of patience, though often patched with new faith.

Poor Joy! Since she was a slim, eager, energetic girl of twelve she had been practical head of this strangely assorted little household in the wilderness. Manteo was a warrior, and a warrior does not work. He fished and hunted. Their table was never without meat. The Society gave them a tithe of grain and cotton. Joy spun and wove, baked and brewed, and she kept her small house in speckless order. Her ambition reached forward to the time when she, too, should be a preacher of the Word. Now, her zeal found expression in the practical details of her housekeeping, the caring for Father Tobias, whose absent-minded, impractical, unworldly bent called daily for more of her energy to supplement his labors.

Jessop sat by the fire. It was a raw, bleak morning, with an unfriendly wind abroad, under a dull gray sky.

As Joy clattered in, with an apronful of chips, "Close the door, I pray you, Mistress Joyce," he called querulously, over his shoulder. "Do you never have any sunshine in this country of yours?"

Joyce knelt on the hearth-stone, and placed her chips with great precision. She was fighting for self-mastery again. "We have sunshine when we are worthy of it, perhaps," she answered finally.

"And at that rate," suggested her guest, with a jarring laugh, "I should go the rest of my ways in the dark, eh, Mistress Joyce Valentine?"

Joy's patience gave way with a little snap. "You know best what your merits are," she returned tartly. "Move your foot, pray; I would set my oven there, and, in any case, you will burn your shoe."

"I can ill afford that," scoffed Jessop, "seeing there is but little shoe left to burn."

Joy arose swiftly, and set out her spinning-wheel. Up the steep path came the Indian, carrying a string of fish. He reached forth his hand, and with a single movement plucked down a young sapling. When he had made fast his catch and the sapling sprung back, Joy turned and called sharply, over her shoulder: "Manteo, I must have some green firewood. I bake bread to-day."

The earliest Methodist preacher was always a circuit-rider. Tobias Valentine, brave soul, had physical as well as spiritual battles to fight. Though his bodily feebleness never limited his zeal, it did limit the reach of his ministerial labors. Therefore the circuit which he rode was somewhat narrowed. To-day he was at Ebenezer, preaching. Joyce, ever unwilling that he should be a hewer of wood, chose the time of his absence to make her request for fuel. The Indian, without response, came softly in, lifted down his gun, and signed to Jessop to accompany him.

"How 's that?" cried Jessop, turning in his chair. "What 's up with old Solemns now?"

"He wants you to go and cut the wood," replied Joy, a little grimly. Manteo had solved the problem, and she was not sorry.

"Cut wood, is it?" asked Jessop, blankly. "Why, I have naught but a penknife to cut it with. My sword, Mistress Joyce, an implement I am more used to wielding than an ax, is not here."

"Nobody could cut wood with a sword," returned Joy. "I suppose you said that for a jest, Master Jessop, but 't is no jest; the wood we must have. Will you cut it, sir, or shall I?"

"Why not my highly respected guide and bodyguard of one?" suggested Jessop, pointing toward Manteo, where he stood waiting.

"Brave no work," remarked that worthy, calmly. "Hunt. Fish. Fight. No work. Squaw work. Paleface work."

"Master—Master—" ("Manteo," supplied Joyce.) "Aye," agreed the other, "Master Manteo, my esteemed friend, your case and mine are identical. I am a warrior myself—a battered one, 't is true—and I 'no work.' " He threw himself back, laughing, in his chair.

" 'T is no jest, sir," repeated Joyce, sternly. "Manteo does not work. He came with us from the Carolinas, where my father cured him of a fever, and he has lived with us many years. He will go with his gun to protect you, for 't is an outlying field, and there are always prowling Indians or wild beasts to be feared."

Jessop arose unwillingly. " 'T is a new rôle," he said; "but, as Master William Shakspere hath it, 'One man in his time plays many parts,' and I vow that, for thy sake, Mistress Joyce, I will e'en play the part of wood-chopper."

Inexperienced as Joyce was, she resented his attitude. "No," she objected, "not for my sake, sir. Do you not also eat bread? And my father? Shall we all starve and perish because you are too fine a gentleman to work?" Then, as his shamed glance, at the word "gentleman," traveled downward over his sorry clothing, Joy's heart smote her, and she added, "Thank you kindly; I will come at noon to bring your dinner."

When Joyce reached the clearing with her dinner-bucket and jug of broth, the Indian was sitting stolidly, his long rifle across his knees, and that introspective gaze of his searching the wooded slopes beyond the river. There was no sound of chopping, and she quickened her pace as she rounded the little opening. Jessop was lying with his arm beneath his head and his face turned up to the sky, apparently dozing, his ax beside him.

The unfrequent color rose in Joy's face at the sight. "Where is the wood for my baking?" she called sharply. "'T is five hours by sun, and not a stick yet cut."

He sat up and, looking indifferently toward her, replied, "Faith, I believe I have been asleep; these roads of yours—do you call them roads?—are enough to lay a man by the heels. I was tired; I stretched me out, and old Solemns over there failed to wake me."

Joyce turned to the Indian, with an angry question. "Indian no chop wood," he answered.

"This cursed climate," shuddered Jessop, "hath a morning mist which chills to the bone. I 've been sitting here, ere I slept, hugging myself to get warm."

"Warm yourself chopping wood, sirrah," flashed Joy, "for the wood we must have. We are out, and bread to bake."

Jessop rose, took up the ax, and bowed sardonically, though his knees shook under him. "Who would not

play Ferdinand to so fair a Miranda?" he cried mockingly. "And see"—pointing to the Indian, who regarded their little byplay not at all—"there 's our Caliban. 'T is the scene, figure for figure, and I will e'en cut you the firewood."

He lifted the ax and struck a straggling, glancing blow, while Joy looked at him with disapproval. She did not comprehend his allusions; the plays of Master Shakspere did not come within the discipline of the Methodist Society, but she perceived that she was mocked. "I know not," she said angrily, "of the persons you mention, but I do know that I must have firewood, and people who are too lazy to work ought to be too lazy to eat. Give me the ax."

Jessop faced her with an exaggerated bow, and burst out laughing. " 'T is as good as a play," he cried. "My faith! 't is better than most plays."

Her little white teeth came together firmly. "Give me that ax," she commanded again, sternly, "and go your ways, sirrah. Find others who are willing to house you idle; my father cannot—I will not. Give me the ax, I say! I can chop the wood—'t will not be the first time by many. We must eat, and we cannot eat raw bread."

"Your lightest wish is a command," responded Jessop, ironically, as he relinquished the ax and dropped, with something like a groan, back into his old posture.

Presently ringing strokes aroused him. Joyce was trying her ax. As he looked she stepped lightly to a small tree. Jessop followed her motions with the simple amusement we give to the performances of an angry child. She had turned the sleeves of blue homespun up to her shoulders, baring round, firm, white arms, and, with a skill born of some experience, she began chopping. The bright hair, loosened by vigor-

ous motion, blew about her flushed face; her red lips were parted, and her gray, large-pupiled eyes were dark with anger. Jessop looked and wondered. Wood, girl, impassive Indian, seemed to him grotesque figures in a dream.

"There," called Joyce, over her shoulder, as the tree fell, "can you not do that, now, after a girl has shown you the way?"

Jessop glared at her in a dazed fashion, and, for no reason, broke into foolish laughter.

Joy looked at him with scarlet cheeks and flashing eyes. Was it not enough that she should do a man's work, while this idle lout looked on? Must she bear it to be jeered at her inappropriate task?

As she gazed, the man's face dropped from mirth to the deepest depth of woe, his shoulders heaved, and in the midst of his discordant laughter he fell to sobbing desperately.

Joy laid her ax slowly down, and went hesitatingly toward him. Jessop had hidden his face. Back of and beyond his terror of this laughter which he could not stifle and these sobs which he could not check, was an overwhelming shame. He, a man and a soldier, weeping like an hysterical woman!

Yet, as Joy came near, in spite of his abasement, he put out a shaking hand and, grasping her dress, hid his face against it. "What is it?" he gasped.

His hand against her own was like fire, and where his wrist crossed her fingers she could feel the leaping of his pulse. "'T is swamp fever you have, belike," she answered, not unkindly, and her eyes interrogated Manteo, who nodded assent.

"God be thanked 't is no worse," murmured Jessop, from the folds of her cape, which he had pulled about his face. "I did fancy I was going mad."

"I am sorry I spoke harshly to you," said Joyce,

simply. "I did not know that you were ill. Can you walk a little, do you think?"

The half-fainting man opened his eyes and replied: "I beg you will not trouble yourself about me. Make him"—pointing to the Indian—"cut the wood for you, and I—will help—drag it home." Then the swoon took him, so that Joyce and the Indian lifted him, limp and unconscious, to the rude sled, and, his head pillowed on Joy's cape, together they got him to the cabin.

When they reached it, one of Father Tobias's characteristic communications was found pinned upon the door with his hunting-knife—the hunting-knife for which he would search, was probably even then searching, in despair.

"Have gone to bury Bushrod Jackson," the message ran. "He is dead."

The latter clause made Joyce laugh hysterically, but she soon turned again to her perplexities. "What shall we do?" she cried.

The Indian raised Jessop, and carried him into the house. "Manteo take care of him all right," he said indifferently. He evidently considered that his ministrations, although perhaps inferior to those of Father Tobias, were quite good enough for this wayfaring man, who had from the first found little favor in his eyes.

Joyce went to the big fireplace in her kitchen, mended the fire, and set on a kettle of water, to prepare the only medicament at hand. Had Father Tobias been present, he would have opened a vein and bled the man at the height of his fever; and, according to the best beliefs of that time, the patient was likely to suffer much from lack of this treatment.

Turning over her store of herbs and simples in search of that root from which the tea should be made, Joy was haunted by the recollection that she had been

unkind to the stranger. She had taunted him with his weakness, and he had wept. At the thought, tears rose in her own eyes. Poor child! with little knowledge of life, and less of men, she did not reflect that Jessop's hysterical outbreak was simply the first workings of the fever in his veins. It appeared to her that his extreme sensibility to reproof showed a tender heart; that innocent, credulous zeal which proclaimed her Father Tobias's very daughter was all aflame at thought of a possible convert. She recognized that this man belonged to a fine and polished world—a world high above her simple belongings. She felt, too, that he had been and was, as she would have phrased it, a sinful man; he might even be a Papist. If she could offer him to God as the first-fruits of that ministry to which she believed herself called, how glorious it would be!

When the tea was brewed, she carried it into the tiny bedroom, scarcely more than a closet. Their patient had been undressed, and a fine white ruffled shirt, with a frill of frayed lace put upon him. It was part of the clothing brought in his sorry bundle when he came to them. He lay now in the bed, his long curls tossed over the pillow, his cheeks flaming, his eyes bright with fever, babbling incessantly in a sort of undertone, while the Indian sat beside him.

As Joyce came in he looked up at her, and his lips curved themselves like the mouth of a child. "O mother!" he murmured, "I 'm glad that you have come. My head! Pray put your hand upon it. See, 't is burning. Ah!" as Joy's cool palm settled upon his brow, "that 's good. I knew that you would put the fire out, mother."

Joyce administered the tea, and bathed Jessop's forehead, sitting beside him, waiting, full of anxious solicitude. But his fever did not abate; indeed, it increased.

Finally, his low mutterings changed to hoarse shouts. Joyce did not recognize the phrases, but he ran through the drill of a cavalry squadron, calling out, and then himself repeating, the orders of officers, and swearing with vexation over the awkwardness of his imagined pupils. He called for his horse. He declared he must be going—he had an engagement to meet, and he mentioned names unknown to Joy.

When she found her strength inadequate to restrain him, she called for Manteo. That worthy came, studied the situation, and rose to it with a coil of small rope in his hand. "Me tie him," he announced. "He no get away from Manteo."

"Why, Manteo! how canst be so cruel? The poor soul is bereft of reason. See, he raves. Take thy hands off him."

A gleam of something like amusement came over the stolid face. "Manteo no hurt him," he insisted. "Manteo take him out bed, drop him in nice cool river. He hot."

With the Indian one could never be sure whether such a proposition as this was deadly earnest, or simply a ferocious jest. Joy, however, took no chonces. She laid a sweeping interdict upon all empiric treatment. "And, Manteo," she said, "see to it that you take good care of the poor man. Be kind and gentle with him. I must go for help."

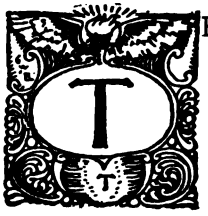
She threw on the gray homespun cloak, and tucked her bright hair sternly away in its stiff, quilted hood. Halting in the cabin door, she looked irresolutely over toward the settlement, then turned her gaze the other way, and decided to seek assistance from their nearest neighbors, the family of Judge Bruin.

She shrank from going alone through mud and rain to Bayou Pierre. The daughter of a nonconforming preacher, belonging strictly to the little community of

Methodists which formed one of the churches or societies of her father's circuit, she was unacquainted with the aristocratic families of the district, even among the English-speaking residents, while the Spanish Catholics who ruled the land were as foreign to her and as little known as though they still dwelt in Spain.

But this girl was not one to let inclination—the voice of the flesh, as she called it—interfere with the promptings of duty. With one backward glance toward her patient and the Indian, who was holding him firmly, but not unkindly, she set forth. The afternoon was waning, cold, cloudy. A thick mist closed in about her, soaking her through.

CHAPTER III



HE immediate surroundings of the Valentine cabin were primitive, with a lingering trace of forest wildness, but the road into which Joy soon turned had been made with care, and thenceforward her way lay straight and smooth. Rain fell now, silently, persistently, and the earth beneath was thick, black mud, but Joy walked with a swinging, agile grace, her head up, and the dark gray eyes looking resolutely before her.

To the south lay a little brotherhood of cabins similar to that of Tobias Valentine, mainly owned and occupied by those belonging to the Society of Methodists, to which her father ministered.

Tobias Valentine was a man of birth and breeding; owing perhaps to the dauntless courage which in him was combined with a most sweet and gentle temper, his small flock had been permitted to worship undisturbed even beneath Spanish Catholic rule.

The members of the Society held themselves a people apart, and asked no favors from their Spanish neighbors, nor even from the wealthy planters among the English-speaking citizens. Yet it was not toward the little group of cabins Joy turned in this emergency. The man back there in her humble home was not of their kind, and so she set her face steadily toward the great house.

She arrived at the mansion, standing well back in a grove of magnolias, and paused for a moment to glance out over the expanse of cultivated land spread before her. Half wistful in her enjoyment of the beauty of this stately demesne, she lifted the heavy knocker, and to its resounding fall a black man, from his seat just within, responded promptly. Her request to see the master evoked a rather scornful look at her shabby figure. She glanced half sadly down over her damp, mud-spattered clothes and forlorn shoes, and felt without resentment that they were indeed unfitted to this sumptuous hallway. This was the first house of any elegance in which she had ever been, yet something in the girl's many-sided nature responded to the grace and seemliness of it as readily as a fine-toned instrument answers the accustomed hand.

From a room in the rear of the house came the sound of talking and laughing, and out of it soon issued also an old gentleman in immaculate small-clothes, cutaway coat, voluminous ruffles, and carefully tied peruke. This was Judge Bruin. He gave her kindly greeting, and when she had explained her errand was about to accede to the appeal in her eyes, if not in her words, that he return with her to the sick man.

He hesitated, however, and glanced through the side lights of the entrance. "'T is a foul evening for you to be abroad, Mistress Valentine," he said. "Cassius," turning to the negro, "tell Mink to bring the gray horses and the carryall around."

Through the open doorway of the dining-room, Joy now had a glimpse of a handsome, graceful masculine head, with the rosy light of shaded wax candles behind it. As the man to whom it belonged turned at the doorway to fling one last laughing jest over his shoulder to some one in the room behind, the charm and grace of his appearance took hold upon her fancy just

as a masterpiece of painting or sculpture would have done. Again across her consciousness there cut a sharp sense of her kinship with these people and this world.

Stepping lightly, with a graceful air, toward Judge Bruin and herself, the newcomer bowed pleasantly and asked: "Is there aught I can do to serve you?" Then, catching sight of Joy's face under the rough sheltering hood, he came yet nearer, and added, "Or can I serve the lady?"

"Nay," deprecated his host; "I do not send my guests on errands which I myself dread." He shrugged his shoulders, and shivered a little. Then, turning with old-time stateliness, "Mistress Valentine, may I present to you Colonel Aaron Burr, late so illustrious in our wars, and promising to become a power in the councils of the nation? I know right well that you have heard of him."

Now, who taught Joyce Valentine to curtsy? She had seen the thing done but two or three times in her life; her instinct, however, told her that here the curtsy came in, and before she was well aware of her own intention she had, with an inclination of the proud little head, a sweep of the slim, arched foot in its soaking shoe, and a quick dropping of the lithe, young form, done the thing—and done it beautifully.

"'T is a gentleman fallen very ill at good Master Valentine's home," proceeded Judge Bruin. "Master Valentine is pastor of our Methodist Society here—the first in the province, as you know, Colonel Burr. We churchmen hold great pride in Master Tobias Valentine, and, though we differ, we do not disagree."

"Is it a fever?" inquired Burr. "If so, I might be of use. I can open a vein as well as any leech living."

"Yes," rejoined the judge, "a fever, and a violent one, so Mistress Valentine saith. Her father is from home. I was going—"

"Nay, nay," interrupted Colonel Burr; "none but myself goes with Mistress Valentine this night. May I delay you a moment,"—turning to the girl,—"while I fetch some remedies and my lancet?"

As Burr came down the stairway, buttoning his many-caped coat of gray about him, the carryall drew up at the door. Thanking the judge with quiet dignity, Joy was handed into the vehicle by her cavalier, and the return journey was begun.

Colonel Aaron Burr, a man well calculated to stir the fancy of an inexperienced girl, was then forty-two years of age, but appeared much younger. With the suavity, the address of a courtier, he was yet not exactly handsome, nor a man of presence, being below rather than above medium height. His features were aquiline, clear-cut, lighted by deep gray eyes. And there lived a power in these wonderful eyes which had changed more than one human destiny. His manner to women, of whatever age or station, was marked by a gentleness and deference infinitely captivating. His wit and sunny temper, his freedom from pessimism, his unquestioned courage and debonair tranquillity in the face of fate, gained him friends and adherents who clung to him amid bitter disaster and disgrace.

The horses floundered through deep mud; rain fell softly, but densely.

Burr, leaning back against the side of the carryall, that his own face might be in shadow, studied the delicate, pure profile of his companion as he saw it against the dusk. "This gentleman is a friend of yours, Mistress Valentine?" he began. "Happy, happy man, to be of so much concern to so fair a friend!"

"Nay," demurred Joy, turning clear, child-like eyes upon him, with frank enjoyment of his pleasant voice and kindly speech. "'T is no friend of mine, sir; 't is a poor, broken gentleman, who came to our

house, three days agone, on just such a night as this. We turn no wanderer away, for father says," with a sudden bubble of laughter, "we may some day entertain an angel unawares. So he remained with us, and now is fallen very ill. As for my solicitude, had you heard how unkindly I spoke to the poor creature, you would not wonder that my conscience bids me do all I can for him."

A little skilful questioning put Burr in possession of Joy's version of the wood-cutting episode. "And canst indeed chop wood with those pretty, pretty hands?" he asked.

Joyce spread a hand artlessly upon her knee. "Are they pretty?" she inquired thoughtfully. "They are small enough, but they are most woefully red and rough, do you not think so?" With a laugh which had a little catch in it almost a sob, "I do so many things like wood-chopping and bread-making and the washing of our clothing, that it would be impossible for me to have white hands," she concluded, as she wrapped them in her cloak and leaned forward to peer ahead.

"A better man than I, Mistress Valentine," said Burr, "would tell you that those hands, roughened by ministering to others, were more beautiful than all the fair and useless hands in the world. For my part," and he laughed whimsically, "I am inclined to say that you are a very odd young damsel—that I have never met your like before. Yet, I believe you are but a child masquerading as a woman, and I do not think sugar-plums are good for children."

It was very little of this speech that Joy comprehended, but she was always ready for a jest, and so she laughed amicably.

As they drove through darkness and rain, Burr questioned and the young girl answered. And when she

reached her home she was aware, with some wonderment, that she had told him things which she had never told even Father Tobias; that he appeared to know her whole history as well, indeed, as though he had been one of the three who drifted down the river in that half-remembered canoe, and had helped to clear away the canes and build first the little log hut, and then the meeting-house which promptly followed it.

Arriving at the cabin, they found the patient still delirious. The Indian was in the outer room, crouched by the fire, and at Jessop's side was a tall, fair young man, whom Joy presented to Burr as Master David Batchelor. It was a face before which disorder fell away; and as he sat holding the sick man's hand, his mere presence plainly quieted the sufferer.

Colonel Burr, as was natural, assumed command of affairs. "First," he announced, "to ascertain, if we may, who this fellow is, and whether he hath friends with whom we may communicate." He picked up the man's bundle, and turned it out upon the table. The linen it contained was tattered and almost useless, but very fine and richly embroidered. There was a small Greek testament, whose Latin inscription set forth that the owner was a graduate of Oxford University. The name had been erased. A broad, plain ring, the only article of value found, had cut upon it, as a seal, the crest which appeared in the embroideries of the linen.

"Well, if our man be a thief, he has stolen all these things from one person; and if they are his own, he is a gentleman of aristocratic birth and superior education," concluded Burr. "Now, for a look at the man himself."

Master Batchelor resigned his place at the bedside to Burr. "This is no thief," he said, with conviction, as he arose.

"How know you that, sir?" inquired Burr, smilingly. "Have you second sight?"

"Nay," returned the young man, "I am that rare thing—a Scotchman without second sight; but, having been sometime a trader and concerned in the cattle business, it hath served me to learn an honest man's eyes and forehead, and I should say this man is not a thief."

Burr put his hand upon that forehead which Master Batchelor had indorsed as an honest one, remarking thoughtfully: "His fever is well advanced; 't is time, methinks, that there were blood let. Mistress Valentine, may I so far trouble you as to ask for a basin and cloths?"

When Joy was gone for the necessary articles, Burr turned to the tall young man and questioned him.

"I know nothing of the matter," returned Batchelor. "I am not, as you seem to apprehend, a member of this family. I but called on my way home from the settlement; my place is 'The Meadows,' just beyond the Half-way House."

At mention of the Half-way House, Burr turned again and looked the man over keenly. "You are, then, near neighbor to some friends of mine, the Guions of Half-way Cottage," he said. "Now, that I think of it, I know you right well from hearsay. You are that Master Batchelor, so irked within the decent frying-pan of the Established Church that he must e'en hop into the Methody fire." The jest was accompanied by Burr's winning smile which deprecated offense.

Batchelor's quiet face reflected a gleam of the amusement in Burr's. "I cry your mercy, sir," he corrected; "I am in neither frying-pan nor fire, but in a very cool and peaceful place of mine own choosing. Master Tobias Valentine is one of the best men I have ever known. Once in seven days I go to hear him talk of spiritual things. If he and his flock need a strong arm of flesh,

or a stronger of coin, 't is my pleasure to supply it; but Methody I am not, and of the Established Church I never was. Perchance I will make all clear to you if I add that I am a Scotchman, and I but take the necessary fifteen years to making up my mind in the matter."

Joy having returned, the vein was opened. Burr watched carefully while the blood flowed, and finally stanched and bound the tiny puncture. During his work over the patient, he studied the face critically.

This restless, ambitious man, Aaron Burr, who had attained many honors, was already reaching a stealthy and secret hand toward honors yet higher. They were plans dangerous to handle, and for that reason the dearer to their audacious originator. He needed always those of his own reckless temper to act with him. It occurred to him, full of his own affairs, that this man, probably high born, now desperately broken in fortune, if not indeed a fleeing criminal, might be a tool laid ready to his hand.

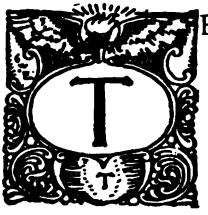
" 'T is not necessary to ask that you take good care of our patient, Mistress Valentine," he said, in departing. "I myself would most willingly change places with him, that I might be ministered to by so sweet a guardian; but, pray you, look well to him about the tenth hour from this. His fever will perchance come up again, and then, if some blood be not let, he may suffer. I will return on the morrow, and I will ask Judge Bruin that he send once during the night to inquire. If you need me at that time, do not hesitate to notify me by his messenger. There is much in the case of this poor soul which commends him to my pity."

Joy thanked him warmly. As she watched him get into the carryall and drive away, she wondered if all great gentlemen were so full of loving-kindness to people beneath them and to those in misfortune. She

had been brought up in a bare, strict creed, taught that the world's people were all in deadly error; and now, this first one of them she met appeared to her as good and generous as Father Tobias himself. Talk of Burr's light living, his unseemly attitude toward many things held most sacred by her people, had reached even her seclusion. But her innocence found in his idle gallantry only a brotherly kindness.

Pastor Valentine would not be home before the morrow. David Batchelor remained to help with the sick man; and during the long night watches, while they shared this task, the girl reverted again and again not to Burr's graces or attractions, but, with eager appreciation, to his quick generosity, his willing service.

CHAPTER IV



HE seventh Sabbath of Jessop's illness brought with it a dazzle of sunshine. Poor Jessop! He had anathematized the climate, cursed the muddy roads and dismal rains. Now, as he lay, feeling almost too languid to lift his tired eyelids and look with dull and wearied eyes toward the light, its rays came pouring in through the low window, and tapestried his little room with fairy gold.

As always, it was upon Joy's head that the brightness seemed to linger most lovingly. She had made the room as clean as hands could make it. And now, kneeling by his bedside, she was reading morning prayers and a chapter.

"Do I weary you, Master Jessop?" she inquired timidly. "Father reads much better than I—might I call him?"

"Nay," whispered the convalescing man, with the ghost of a smile; "that would take away my Joy, indeed."

Joy laughed appreciatively. "May I read you a hymn, then?"

"I pray you," answered Jessop, in that painfully tired voice which moved her woman's soul to such compassion that she could feel no resentment, whatever the matter of his speech—"I pray you, Mistress Joy, turn my pillow, so that I may see your face more easily

as I lie, and read me something about love. Such lips as yours were never meant to waste their sweetness discoursing upon other matters."

Joy adjusted his pillows, seated herself in the bedside chair, and announced with serenity, resolutely unconscious of any under meaning in his words, "Hark, then, I will read ye the most beautiful hymn of divine love Charles Wesley ever wrote."

There was a little grimace, then followed a smile as her eloquent young voice began upon the words:

> "Thy only love do I require,
> Nothing in earth beneath desire,
> Nothing in heaven above:
> Let earth and heaven and all things go,
> Give me Thine only love to know,
> Give me Thy only love."

"Mistress Joyce, when you read it," he murmured, as the verses were finished—"when you read it, 't is all one, divine love or earthly love; for whatever you say, you speak to me of love."

"I hope so," answered Joy, simply; "it is God's command that we love one another."

He raised his heavy eyes and gazed straight into her earnest face. "Nay, sweet," he remonstrated, "love not too many; love only me."

Joy drew back with a gesture of disrelish, and gathered up her hymnal and Bible, preparatory to departure. "The command is to love all men, sinners as well as the just," she remarked, somewhat dryly; "but I assure you, Master Jessop, my father is much better able to love sinners than I. I have not patience with them, though oft I pray for it."

"Good lack!" called Colonel Burr's voice, from the door. "Here 's the Mother Superior shriving my patient's soul. Is 't so bad as that? Is he *in extremis?*"

"Not so, colonel," returned the sick man, and a spice of malice gave strength to his voice. "Mistress Valentine hath but talked to me of love. Perchance my soul doth not commend itself to her."

Joy greeted the newcomer gravely, and thanked him for coming to sit with their almost recovered patient. Burr had been unremitting in his attentions during Jessop's tedious illness; and now, as he had done several times formerly, he came to relieve Joy, so that she should hear at least a portion of the morning service. Jessop's last words gave the girl great offense, and she left the room with her haughty young head well up.

A proud-carried creature, Joy impressed Burr as little like the typical Methody devotee. Laughing, he remarked to Judge Bruin, when shown a pet filly turned loose in the south paddock: "True blue, that, judge. Why not name her Mistress Joy? She 's high-headed, yet scarce as much so as our fair little Methody herself."

"You see," he began now, sitting down by the bed, "you go too far. 'T is no ordinary country parson's daughter, to come fluttering to the first lure."

Joy's spiritual aloofness tantalized Jessop's curiosity as much as her limpid candor compelled his respect. But now he muttered peevishly: "They all like it—hang 'em! and they all flout it. That 's to get more of it, I warrant."

"Think you so?" returned Burr. "Likely you 're right in most cases; but, if I mistake not, Mistress Joyce Valentine hath a mind of her own—aye, and a pretty little temper of her own to boot." He laid his hand on the patient's forehead, asked him a few brief, business-like questions, then, "I think we might try sitting up to-morrow," he announced.

"Sit up?" echoed Jessop, angrily. "Do you want

to kill me, Colonel Burr? Here have I been, flat o' my back more than six weeks, and you—a leech, indeed!—have taken some quarts, or gallons, of my good red blood. Now, you 'd have me sitting—when I scarce can lift my head!"

Burr stood at the window, measuring a dose from one of his vials. "Good blood, eh, Jessop? I thought as much. But I have e'en fancied 't was blue, rather than red."

"Let be," growled the sick man. "You took too much of it, red or blue, and I 'll not be able to stir from this bed before spring."

Burr threw back his head and laughed. "Come now! You would lie there just so long as you could have a pretty nurse to minister to you—eh? But let me warn ye, my good man, Mistress Joyce is no fool. Those bright eyes of hers can see farther into a thing and clearer than you guess."

Jessop smiled, but uneasily. "Perhaps," he said, "Mistress Joy, when she ceases to be interested in ministering to a sick body, may find her good offices entreated by a sick soul."

"Ahem! Fair scheme," commented the other. "As long as they think there 's a chance of your turning Methody you may live here off the old man and the girl at no charge."

"God's blood, Colonel Burr! I swallow no such words from any man, whether he be one who saved my miserable life or no." The tears of weakness, mortification, and rage stood in Jessop's eyes. "Why do you bait me thus? 'T is your fault I 'm this side the river Styx." Burr nodded, without a word. "Well, then, you 've played at God and created a man. What are you going to do with him? Here am I. Will you have me for a servant? I have myself been served enough years to know how the thing should be done."

"Nay, Major Jessop," Burr rejoined, and looked covertly to see how this title struck the other. "I have better things laid up for you than serving even myself."

An answering compression of Jessop's lips convinced his companion that a military style was not new to him, and half assured him that the one he had applied was by no means too exalted. Seating himself by the bedside, he began, with that skill and address of which he was so perfect a master, to hint, and even practically detail to Jessop, a scheme which was then brewing in his restless brain.

The Mississippi Province—claimed largely by Georgia—was at this time practically without a government. Spain had ceded it, with other territory, to the United States. There were still Spanish troops in the garrisons at Natchez and Fort Nogales, but Spain's claim to the land was no longer tenable. Yet the United States, itself a young, untried government, had not yet been able to occupy and control its newly gotten southwest territory. General Wilkinson, commander-in-chief of the army, writing at the time to Captain Guion (uncle of Mistress Wilful Guion, Burr's friend of the Half-way House, whom he had mentioned to David Batchelor), in charge of the troops designed to enter and occupy the province, speaks of the doubtful tenure by which the planters of the section now held their land becoming "a dangerous element of agitation in the hands of certain parties who must be described as enemies of their country," and believes that "this and other arguments are being used to persuade the most influential class of men in the section to the usurpation of the right of self-government." That such a plan was contemplated, and even matured as to many of its details, is certain.

The scheme which Burr now chose to describe to Jessop was the erection of this province into a separate

republic, which, if opportunity offered, should become *the* Republic. This once established, Colonel Burr hinted at greater opportunities for power. He touched upon the success of Bonaparte's military despotism, which was then preparing the world for his *grand coup*.

Jessop had never been the man for a desperate venture; his nature was too pleasure-loving and too inconsequent. His fortunes were now, however, at that ebb where they cried out for a new tide. But he was sick and peevish, and he pushed aside Burr's most alluring pictures to dilate on his own pains and necessities.

The exquisite adroitness with which Jessop's tempter withdrew any suggestion that seemed to be unpleasing, substituted something more attractive, bent to the patient's opinions or desires, only to arouse other emotions which might serve his own turn, cajoled, flattered, inflamed and half irritated his desired tool, showed, indeed, a past master of his art.

All that was wilful, selfish, base, licentious in Jessop's being was brought uppermost. Burr's tactful hints played about his mind like a light, veering breeze, but they blew always upon the sullen embers of resentment which lay at the bottom of this poor bankrupt's soul. Surely coals were there which might be fanned to a destructive blaze.

And yet, occasionally, this man, born so close to the purple that Burr's schemes seemed petty to him, saw that he was being used, and resented it. Torn by many conflicts, not the least among them an unrecognized appeal from the life he had seen and been a part of in the house of Tobias Valentine, he turned finally on his side and cried out sharply: "Well, well, Colonel Burr, I 'll think of these things! Let me sleep now, an 't please you."

The smiling patience with which Burr accepted this check was thoroughly characteristic of the man.

"Surely," he acquiesced; "let me read you to sleep. Greek is like falling water or rumbling winds. 'T is monstrous soothing to the ear that 's weary of too significant English."

Taking the little leather-bound volume, he selected his chapter, and, giving the rolling words in a sort of monotone, read till he saw the tired eyes closing. And Jessop's last waking thought bracketed him with Father Tobias and Joy as the kindest and most considerate of friends.

But Burr knew well, as he sat studying the man's sleeping face, that the seed he had sown, though covered now by forgetfulness, was fallen on productive soil.

CHAPTER V

THE flush of resentment still lay on her clear, pale skin, when Joyce turned away from the sick man and his voluntary attendant. The dark gray eyes, which as a rule gazed abroad on the world with a fearless directness, held a preoccupied look. She was bound for the place of worship, but she was in no worshiping mood.

Pastor Valentine, in his broad-rimmed soft hat and Quakerish garments, stepped a trifle ahead, for it was close upon meeting-time. He carried his Bible and prayer-book, and offered to take the lunch-basket which, on bright days when the weather was sufficiently warm, was a part of the church accoutrement, but Joy refused, and herself carried it. With all her impulse and enthusiasm, she had an unhurried walk. She never lagged; her step gave an impression of sureness, but it was without haste.

After her, his gun across his shoulder, stalked Manteo, with stolid face, but with an eye keen to discover any lurking peril.

At the bottom of Joy's mind lay a questioning unrest, induced by Jessop's attitude toward her and his words. Entirely unused to contact with such a mind as this, she was bewildered by his light outlook upon life. Before her, life had been spread, a serious thing. She regarded it as a journey wherein the strongest

must faint unless upheld by divine grace. Could it be that there was somewhere a world peopled with men and women like the man yonder, who laughed and made merry over light things, unmindful of the dread payment which must be made in a time to come?

She allowed, in her crude young soul, that eternal damnation was justly the portion of such, yet underneath it all there was a feeling of kinship with this world of laughter and enjoyment. She sighed. Jessop had been shown to her in sorry guise. She was not sure even that, had she seen him back in that world to which he belonged, she would have admired and cared for him; and yet there is to a girl always a charm, a something unforgetable, about the first man who, breaking through her virgin reserve, assailing the holy of holies in her pure, ignorant heart, dares speak to her of love.

The three had been moving for some time toward the little house of worship, set in the midst of a canebrake on the banks of the great southern Mississippi. Each felt proprietorship in the tiny church. Tobias Valentine had gone in among the canes, and with his own hand had hewn and builded this first Methodist chapel in the province. His love for the little log building was reverent, humble, but as tender and enduring as that of a father for his helpless first-born. It represented the first-fruits of his hopes—independence to "worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience." It stood to him in his time for all that this great Commonwealth of America stands for to the men of to-day.

To Joyce it was a visible reminder of that which she was striving to attain in her spiritual life; it was precious, too, with the labor of her old father's toil-worn hands, and as the building came in sight the clouds left her face.

Little parties of two and three were overtaking, passing, or following them as they walked. These were mainly young mothers and fathers, each pair with a numerous brood of children about them. The old people were few, and the young men and women walked apart, concerned with affairs of their own. The blue-gray homespun, dyed by the housewives themselves with native indigo, was worn by both men and women. The color appeared in wool and hemp and the new cotton, which was then beginning to be woven extensively, so that Pastor Valentine's congregation looked almost like a company of Quakers. The women's skirts were short, and they wore heavy leathern shoes, showing broad, low heels, for there was mud to be tramped through. No fluttering ribbons were in view, nothing anywhere quite so bright as Joy's rebellious locks. The discipline of the early Methodist Society permitted the wearing of no gauds calculated to minister to the lusts of the flesh as represented by a craving for beauty.

And yet, where purity and peace abide, poor chidden beauty will slip in, though you make a stepchild of her. The prim white kerchiefs were folded about necks almost as white. The demure down-dropping of young, bright eyes only served to display long, curled lashes, and the gray homespun set off excellently well many a fresh, young, round cheek that needed no rouge added to the roses already abloom upon it.

The young men and girls, though holding a little apart from their elders, did not walk together; the girls went two and two, and the young men, singly or in squads, followed them a trifle sheepishly.

There was no unseemly love-making at these primitive meetings, but was ever temple erected to any god which could quite bar out the little blind deity of the bow and quiver?

Two women, one tall almost to the stature of a

GOING TO CHURCH.

man, the other evidently her daughter, fair, slight and young, overtook Father Tobias's party, and joined them, with the usual Sabbath greetings.

The tall woman, who was spoken to as Sister Longanecker, looked sad reproach at the little basket Joy was carrying. She considered it her own especial and blessed privilege to feed the pastor with material food, even as he fed her with spiritual bread. "Now, Joyce," she lamented, in a small, cooing voice which mismatched her great form, but accorded comically with the matter of her speech, "I hold it most unkind that ye bring food for your good father. I have a pasty here; 't was made for him, and I put a prayer in with every bird. The crust is as melting as love itself." She cast a most affectionate glance at Father Tobias's unresponsive, absent-minded old back, as he strode ahead, already conning the words he was to speak.

The young girl, Patience Longanecker, interrupted Joyce, plucking her by the sleeve and whispering: "O Joyce! is it a young man who is sick at your house, and is he well favored?"

The lines of Joy's red lips were as prim as though no unspiritual thoughts had ever invaded her own Sabbath musings. "Patience," she said reprovingly, "do you remember what day this is? We are going to meeting," whereupon Patience dropped her eyes and sighed. She was a dear little gossip, and she did long to be able to tell all the other girls just what color the stranger's eyes were, and what wonderful things he had said to Joyce Valentine.

The party walked on in seemly quiet. Near the church door a huddled heap among the canes beside the path unrolled itself, stood erect, and displayed the shriveled face of a very old squaw. "Good day, Massawippa," spoke Father Tobias. "God be with you,"

and Manteo greeted her with a low-uttered guttural, evidently in her own tongue.

The old woman's bleared eyes turned adoringly upon the girl. Joy, putting out her hand to take the withered and shaking one, drew the trembling creature forward, and said: "Now, Sister Longanecker, if it pleases you, I will bestow my evening lunch on Massawippa, and Father Tobias shall eat your pasty."

Manteo turned, with a contemptuous glance at the newcomer. "What Manteo eat?" he inquired, pointedly. And as Sister Longanecker's bountiful affection did not appear to reach so far, he was directed, to his great disgust, to share the basket with Massawippa.

The bleak, gray meeting-place stood like a pale silhouette against a reeded background. For miles an almost unbroken cane-brake, or thicket, spread along the river's edge. When Tobias Valentine chose a site for his house of worship the thick, impenetrable bulwark of these slender columns commended the spot for his purpose.

To the eye accustomed to the broken, ornate architecture of the old world, this little squared block was as bare, unlovely, and undesirable as was to the churchman the creed which called for it. Its low windows looked out unwinkingly, searching the thickets for foes. More than once it had been the object of Indian attacks, and the doors were made thick and strong. There were great inside shutters, loopholed for guns, with poles beside them, that they might be propped at need. It was an outlying spiritual stronghold, and a physical fort as well, patiently prepared for defense along both lines.

Joyce and the others stepped inside. Sister Longanecker detained Pastor Valentine in earnest conversation a little apart. The old man's saintly face took on an expression of deep distress.

"Oh, no," he remonstrated, "sister, surely not, surely not."

"But I tell ye," cooed Sister Longanecker's dove-like whispering tones, " 't is like to bring scandal upon the Society."

"I think less of that," returned Father Tobias, "than that it may bring sorrow to the child herself."

"She hath need of it," returned Sister Longanecker, energetically. " 'Woe be to him by whom offense cometh!' We must keep ourselves unspotted from the world. Though I myself have been a widow many years, I warrant me there is no gallant gay nor fine enough to tempt me to bring scandal upon the Society."

Father Tobias's misty eyes smiled faintly upon her iron visage. "Nay," he said, "sister, we all know that." And when he smiled so, one saw how like, with all their differences, were his features and Joy's.

Once in the pulpit, or behind the poor little pine table which served for pulpit, the world was shut away from Tobias Valentine. He was in a place of white light, and those before him were embodied souls for whose salvation he was responsible. One was no greater than another. At such times Joy's soul was not more precious to him than that of Sister Longanecker. They were all his debt to God, to be striven for strenuously, to be weighed in the scale lovingly. The responsibility of their salvation was heavy upon his heart.

The benches in that little meeting-house were backless. A cushion—the mere thought of one, could this latter have been detected—would have brought a member under discipline. The women sat in orderly rows, eager, intent and untiring, listening while Father Tobias spoke to them for one long hour and a half. The children—divine grace is not applicable to babies, and the doctrine of original sin is amply exemplified in

many of them—writhed and squirmed. Those old enough, were sternly repressed. Their small, rough-shod feet swung off the floor. When too sleepy, their poor little heads nodded, and occasionally they tumbled head and heels to the planks, making a small diversion. The tyrants who were younger, and therefore less amenable, expressed their disapproval openly and loudly. They were sometimes fed surreptitiously under a shoulder cape, or, if the disturbance continued until Father Tobias's gentle gaze began to wander in their direction too frequently, they were carried outside and hushed.

The men and women sat on opposite sides of the room. Joy was on the front bench of the women's side, and Batchelor on the front bench on the men's side. A choir would have been an abomination, but these two strong young voices were useful in holding the singers together.

Joyce had heard so many sermons in her short life that her mind wandered a bit during the discourse, and occupied itself with its own concerns. She mused deeply and long upon the matter of Jessop's salvation. Would the blessed privilege be theirs of converting the stranger within their gates? Oh, might they snatch his soul as a brand from the burning?

Here she was suddenly recalled to her surroundings by the conclusion of Father Tobias's seventhly with a sonorous "Amen." After a pause the preacher's voice began again: "Now, brothers and sisters, I have to speak to you of a matter which hath been brought to my notice this morning." Sister Longanecker settled herself complacently to hear administered the reproof for which she had asked.

"It hath been suggested to me that one member of this Society may bring scandal upon the whole Society. I desire to ask your prayers—" there was a

little hesitation, and he added—"for that one who made this suggestion to me."

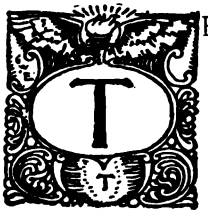
Sister Longanecker bent her head and wept. She had not the grace of artistic grief. Her sobs considerably resembled bleats, and it became evident to the whole congregation for whom their petitions were requested.

"We are here, my brethren and sisters, a little handful of the faithful in a far land," the pastor continued. "There are hostile savages about us, and wild beasts in the forests. Even as we live in daily fear of these, so God ordains that we are set in a place of fear from unseen spiritual foes. The painted savages of envy and malice and uncharitableness lurk for our immortal souls, even as we have seen the painted savages lurk in these cane-brakes to harm our perishing bodies. The wild beasts of doubt and sin will rend the immortal part, quite as surely as the panther or the wolf may strike one of us down in the forests.

"What do we do against the savages and wild beasts? We band together. What shall we do against these subtler and more dreadful foes?" He looked wistfully and long at the faces before him ere he answered his own question. Then he concluded gently: "To be strong against all these 'foes within,' let us keep fully Christ's command, 'That we love one another.'"

And, raising his hands, he blessed and dismissed them.

CHAPTER VI



HOUGH services at the little meeting-house were to last all day, Joyce, having gotten her freedom to hear the morning sermon only through Burr's courteous offer to stay during that time with the patient, set forth on her return immediately they were dismissed.

The day was warm and bright. Only a touch of frost at morning and evening marked the approach of winter. Cloths were being spread in the open, baskets unpacked, and women went to and fro preparing for a noon lunch. David Batchelor joined Joy as she turned toward home. "May I walk with you, Mistress Valentine?" he asked.

Joy accepted his company gladly. Since she could remember, David Batchelor had been one of the pleasant and stable facts of her existence. It was a relief, in the vague unrest which followed Jessop's disquieting words, to turn to Batchelor's kindness, which made no demand.

It was characteristic of the frankness of the girl's nature that she spoke to him at once of Jessop. "You think he is a gentleman, do you not?" she inquired.

"A gentleman, Mistress Joyce? Truly, yes; the man is of gentle blood."

"Sister Longanecker," hesitated Joy, with troubled eyes, "holds it like that Master Jessop—she doth not

believe his name to be Jessop—is some great lord or rich man who hath committed a crime and is fleeing from the authorities. What think you of that, Master Batchelor? Is it like?"

"To my mind, not more likely," returned David, "than that the man is innocent of all fault, save that one fault which is very great in the eyes of some—misfortune."

Joy nodded.

"He may have come from England," continued Batchelor, "like many another young blade, with much wealth and little wisdom. We can see with no trouble he hath lost the first. I think we should all pray that he may be vouchsafed the second. In God's name, if we be indeed God's people, let us think no evil until evil be proven."

"Why do you speak of England?" inquired Joy, a little curiously.

"Oh, the Testament, and the man's speech and bearing—it seems like that he is an Englishman of rank."

This brought them to the doorway. David entered with her, and after a little conversation among the three men, while Joy was absent at her household duties, Burr and Batchelor made their adieux, and started on the Washington Road northward along the river. Burr's horse had been tied to a sapling in the grove near the cabin, but, out of courtesy to his companion, he forbore to mount it.

"Pray ride, Colonel Burr," suggested the other. "I can easily keep pace with your horse."

"Nay," returned Burr; "we will converse more pleasantly if both walk, and I find your conversation of much interest, Master Batchelor. You know this country and these people as no man I have yet encountered knows them."

The flattery was received with a grave bow. "I am

much interested in the English-speaking people hereabout," continued Burr. "Particularly am I curious regarding your own sect. You are, after all, a Methodist, are you not, Master Batchelor?"

"Why, yes," answered Batchelor, with his quiet smile; "I trust I have method in all things."

Burr was slightly taken aback. "Judge Bruin tells me," he began once more, "that you are much concerned just now in matters military."

"I am," returned Batchelor, "or I have been. Here we are subject, as you know, to continual uprisings of the Indians. The blacks, so far from affording protection, are themselves a source of anxiety. And now that Spain no longer rightfully possesses, and yet will not relinquish the land, our condition is bad—promising worse. It appeared to me that a man who had leisure to do so should fit himself to train a militia company, and when I found the time I went to Fort Rosalie and did fit myself, as best I might, to instruct my neighbors in the art of war."

"A man of your qualities," suggested Burr, "a natural leader of men, as I conceive you to be, would enjoy such positions as give power while entailing responsibility."

"Why, no," corrected Batchelor, quietly. "I cannot say, Colonel Burr, that I seek or anticipate any enjoyment in the matter. I am, as you know, a planter, a tiller of the soil. It is my ambition to breed better stock, to raise finer crops than another, to adjust myself more nearly to understand Nature as she reveals herself here in this new country, but not, I believe, to become, as you suggest, a leader of men."

"I find I must reclass you in my mental register. You are, meseems, in your present humor, a modern Timon."

"'T is like this," explained Batchelor, "God made

man, and God made the cattle. I have worked with cattle all my life, and now for some months I have been driving men. I find them, as you must admit, who have handled both men and cattle—horses, at least —considerably alike. I think it no harm to prefer the society of the cattle. They are both God's creatures, and the cattle and the crops leave my mind freer to its own workings than the society of mankind."

Burr laughed, and professed to treat the statement as a sarcasm.

"Nay, I meant it not unkindly," supplemented Batchelor. "This country is my country, these people are my people. I have cast in my lot among them for good and all, and especially with the Society of Methodists, though I have not joined them, their creed being somewhat strait, or I, perchance, a trifle broad. I hold no grudge against any man or any company of men, and my interest is not limited to my own plantation and its belongings."

Midway the slope of Half-way Hill, on the road between Washington and Natchez, stood the cottage of a widow, a gentlewoman from Virginia, with one beautiful daughter—Mistress Wilful Guion. The younger woman was, through a combination of circumstances, a probationer in Pastor Valentine's little band; the mother was a Catholic. The marked beauty of the daughter, the aristocratic appearance of the mother, the fact that their fortune, though modest, permitted them to live without work, set them rather apart in that sturdy little homespun group. Their place, a little, picturesque cottage, was called, because of its position on the hillside, "The Half-way House."

As David Batchelor and his companion neared its gateway, Burr lifted his hat in adieu. "I stop here, Master Batchelor," he said. "I believe your own place is further on?"

"I shall take great pleasure in welcoming you there, sir, when your convenience serves you to visit 'The Meadows,'" answered Batchelor, formally; and he added: "Mistress Guion is ill. Her daughter bade me carry the news to Master Valentine this morning as an excuse for her own non-appearance at the meeting."

"I had heard of her illness," returned Burr, "and I thought to call and inquire if there were aught in which I could serve her. Methinks that is Mistress Wilful at the casement now." Again he lifted his hat and bowed. The girl, blushing and smiling, came from the window to the open doorway, and seemed to hesitate whether or not she should walk down the pathway toward them. It was evident to Batchelor that Burr's visit was by appointment. There was to him a suggestion that the mother's illness was but a pretext to shield her daughter from the gossip which even now coupled her name with Burr's.

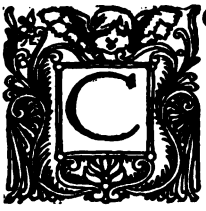
At sight of the waiting figure the colonel's handsome face glowed, in spite of his pretended nonchalance. Batchelor paused long enough to speak to Wilful, offering any assistance possible in case her mother should be worse, and then went gravely on his way.

Looking back, he saw that the girl had stepped through the wicket; Burr, with his horse's bridle still over his arm, was walking, beside her, back and forth in front of the cottage. They were talking earnestly; both heads were bent, and something in the attitude of the slim, girlish form, which seemed to lean toward that of her cavalier, and yet to shrink with a kind of timorous panic, knocked loudly at his heart for sympathy.

His own conversation with Burr had resembled the playing of a light and gracious wind about a granite cliff, yet now that the wind was wooing a rose there

was a mighty difference. Hot southern breezes are death to roses. He sighed impatiently. "Well, well," he said to himself, "there are defenseless things throughout creation which are being preyed upon hourly. Since there were chickens there have been hawks, and I must e'en let matters go as they will."

CHAPTER VII



OLONEL BURR saw surprisingly little of the invalid during that call which was made avowedly upon her. It was the girl, in blooming health, who occupied an unconscionable amount of his time. But, returning, he found his head filled, not with images of sweet Wilful Guion; that busy brain swarmed, instead, with queries and vague conjectures concerning the man who was, even then, thinking of him.

Batchelor's rather ponderous poise was in such broad contrast to the petulant weakness of Jessop that Burr sighed impatiently. "If a man could only come by the proper tools," he muttered, "all would swim easy. This fellow Batchelor—he would have made a good king of the stalwart persuasion, in the days when a king won and kept his throne by his own physical prowess as well as mental balance and ascendancy—he is not to be lightly won to anything; but the case is not hopeless, I have ciphered harder sums. I will see more of him."

Later, at Judge Bruin's table, he brought the conversation around to the object of his personal interest.

"David Batchelor, sir," replied the judge to his inquiry, "is one of the finest men God ever made—one of the very finest, Methodist or no Methodist, sir. He will take his rank in this community, and he will leave

his mark on this community, and this community is the better for his having lived in it."

"He struck me," returned Burr, "as a man born considerably above the station which he at present chooses for himself."

"His birth is good, sir," said the judge; "how good, I do not know. You would never surprise me if you told me his blood was royal, and I should not think the less of him if I learned he was the son of a peasant. 'T is the man himself who counts, and counts high, among us."

"What was his business in Mexico?" inquired Burr. "He mentioned to me that he had been there."

"Cotton," answered the judge, laconically. "If this is ever a cotton-growing country,—and some of us think it will be the cotton-growing section of the whole land,—it will be largely owing to David Batchelor. The first cotton we got here was from Georgia. When Batchelor heard there was better seed to be had in Jamaica, he went over there. He is a man of means, and footloose. The Jamaica cotton—you remember it, Burr—I raised it extensively. It was the black-seeded. Good fiber, fine staple, and we did well with it until it began to have the rot. If Batchelor had not been a man of means he would have been ruined by the rot, for the year in which it appeared every acre he had was in cotton. Some of the planters then put in the green-seeded Cumberland cotton—inferior, short-staple stuff. It did not rot; but, faith, I had so little pride in it, I was willing it should."

"Master Batchelor, then, as I understand it," inquired Burr, "was seeking a rot-proof cotton in Mexico?"

"He was," replied the judge. "You asked me about Batchelor's birth and antecedents. All I know of them is that he had such influence in high quarters as pro-

cured him letters which, carried to Mexico, got him the friendship of the viceroy. He was dining at the viceregal table when he stated his mission, and requested leave to take back with him some of the Mexican cotton-seed. The viceroy, however complaisant, was helpless in the matter. 'T was after the treaty of San Lorenzo, by which Spain ceded this province to the United States. The double-dealing, grim old thief hath never delivered up the land to its rightful owners —not to this day; but the treaty was made pretext to deny us cotton-seed, on the ground that Spanish law forbade its exportation."

"But Batchelor, I take it," suggested Colonel Burr, "is a man to gain his ends. He is not to be balked."

Judge Bruin knit his shaggy white brows at some hint the words appeared to convey to him. "Only by fair means, Colonel Burr," put in Mistress Bruin, from her end of the table. "David Batchelor is an upright man in all his dealings, though a Methodist and a man of uncouth manner."

"I should not call him uncouth, Mistress Bruin," objected the judge. "A self-contained man, and one not so like to take a silly girl's fancy as some popinjay with one half his sense."

A glance at prim young Mistress Margaret Bruin revealed the fact that she was blushing. "Dear me, *ma mère*, why did you start father off again? When he is on the subject of his paragon we must all applaud."

"Peg, be still! 'Speak when you 're spoken to.' 'Children should be seen, and not heard,' " remarked the judge, in a rapid fusillade.

"There are those," suggested Colonel Burr, "who can well afford, being seen, not to be heard."

Margaret arose swiftly, and, dropping a graceful little curtsy, murmured her thanks.

"It is not best to flatter them up too much," grumbled the judge. "You see, don't you? She is like all the others, and knows not a good thing when she sees it; hath not sense to appreciate a real man; wants a beau only fit to wear farthingale and tucker."

"I do not want a beau at all," protested poor Mistress Peg, almost in tears.

"Margaret, you may retire," suggested Mistress Bruin, in a stately fashion. "We will leave the gentlemen to their wine."

When Burr returned to his seat, after bowing the ladies out, "About the cotton—you were saying—?" he inquired, with raised eyebrows.

"The cotton, yes," resumed the judge. "The viceroy could not get Batchelor cotton-seed to carry home with him, but, as they sat chatting over their wine, as you and I sit now, he jokingly offered him a collection of Mexican dolls. Batchelor well understood the offer, and thanked him. These dolls were stuffed with cotton-seed, and the whole Natchez district is now raising cotton from the seed that was brought over in the puppets."

"That, then, I understand, is the source of his means."

"Not at all, not at all," replied the judge. "You do not know the man. Did he trade upon the necessities of the rest of us? Not he. He was three years before he planted any cotton at 'The Meadows,' excepting such as was for seed to give away to his neighbors. He has a competence outside his income from the plantation. Yet, had he not, 't is my belief David Batchelor would find a way to do all he does without it. He has brought over Scotch mechanics, skilled men whom he knew in the old country, to work on the perfecting of a cotton-gin. His neighbors, and all comers, profit

by any improvement he has made upon the gin at 'The Meadows.' "

"I was talking with him this morning," remarked Burr, "of his recent military duties."

"And," added Judge Bruin, "he let you think that he learned all he knows of war and warlike tactics over at Fort Rosalie?"

"That did he," replied Burr.

The judge chuckled. " 'T is like David. To what command or what arm of the service he may have belonged I know not, only that he was thoroughly grounded in tactics when he came to this country I know right well. The instruction he had at Rosalie was merely to polish up his knowledge, and also to learn what might be learned of our methods of warfare with the savages in this new land."

"Think you," inquired Burr, idly, "that such a man as he is like to succeed Master Valentine as pastor here, when he weds the daughter?"

"Weds whose daughter?" inquired Judge Bruin, tartly.

"I speak of Mistress Joyce Valentine. Methinks she and Master Batchelor are both unusual persons for their class, and 't would be a suitable match, eh, judge?"

The old man's choleric countenance flushed darkly. "God's blood! Colonel Burr, a man would think, to hear ye prate of classes and the like, we had treacherous aristocrats in the nation's councils. Congress hath abolished classes. There are no classes, sir. All men be free and equal before God."

Burr smiled quietly as he soothed the old man's passion with plausible explanations. He had gotten the information he desired. Judge Bruin, it appeared, was a hearty supporter of the United States government, and a whole-souled believer in all it stood for.

"You talk of classes," the judge went on; "look at Tobias Valentine. A man as well born as you or I—better, perchance—he leaves country, friends, renounces even his fortune—his connections are all wealthy men, Colonel Burr, men of substance. He comes here into the wilderness and labors among our people for their betterment. Oh, he is a Dissenter, a Methodist, I grant ye; but even the Spaniards respect him, and I say that when we sit up at our tables and prate of class regarding such a man as that we are damned aristocrats, sir, damned aristocrats—no less!" and he banged an emphatic hand upon the board.

The entrance of a negro interrupted Burr's reply. "Massa Valentine," announced Cassius, in some excitement. "He say, mightly 'ticklar. Mus' I bring 'im in?" Judge Bruin nodded.

In answer to some sudden alarm which was in the air, both men arose and stood confronting Father Tobias with anxious faces as he entered. Having greeted them and made his apologies for visiting upon the sacred Sabbath day, the preacher seemed for the first time to note the unusual excitement of both. "You have already heard my news?" he exclaimed.

"Nay," replied Judge Bruin, "what is it? Have the negroes risen?"

And Burr in the same breath asked: "Is it the Spanish? Is it the Indians?" And thus were voiced the triune terrors of the Southwest of that day.

"'T is not immediate," returned Father Tobias; "'t is rumor only, but I thought well to come at once."

"Be seated, Master Valentine," said the judge. He beckoned a negro, and bade him place a glass of wine, which Father Tobias declined. The three men then settled themselves at the board for their conference.

"'T is the old squaw, Massawippa," began the visitor.

"She who warned us last spring," interrupted Judge Bruin, "in time to prevent the slaughter of our hogs and cattle in the outlying pastures."

The other nodded. "Massawippa comes at times to our meeting-house," he went on, "and my daughter Joyce hath much hope for the salvation of her soul."

It was evident that the judge thought so useful a person as the squaw sure of salvation, heathen or no heathen; but he repressed the words he would have spoken upon the subject, and Pastor Valentine continued: "This woman was at the meeting to-day, and on her way home she stopped at our dwelling, where, finding my daughter alone, she told her there was a plan afoot for the Natchez to unite with the Chickasaws and cross the river here, going south on a foray."

"Then," remarked Burr, gravely, "they will reach us in their full strength, and before they have struck a blow. Is the Spanish garrison trustworthy, think you?"

A quick, appreciative glance from both his companions answered this prompt casting in of his lot with theirs. "Nay," said the judge. "'T is more like that the Spanish are at the bottom of this, but David Batchelor and his company will do their part, and every house in this poor, harried, and exposed land is a fortress."

The preacher sighed as the judge left the room to send a messenger bidding David Batchelor join their councils. "'T is not wonderful," he remarked, "that these poor lost sheep of the Father come up against us in battle. We have many times set them the example."

"The lesson of your own life, Master Valentine," returned Burr, smoothly, "and that of your flock would surely be a good one. It should teach peace."

"I pray for faith," said Father Tobias, "and yet it hath oft seemed to me that evil is more quickly learned

than good. The Spaniards burned an old woman here, Colonel Burr. 'T was a harmless old squaw who had come to my daughter many a time begging. I was from home. 'T was when Sister Barbara Heck, with many of the godliest of our faith, were gathered in the East for a conference. I, one of the least among us, was called to be present. On my return, daughter Joyce, a child of scarce fifteen, told me of how, to please the Choctaws, the governor (a Spaniard then, you mind) had let them build a scaffold here and burn the poor old soul. Manteo the Indian, you may have seen at my house, speaks all their tongues, and he told me that to the last she cried doom down upon our people as well as upon her tormentors. She prophesied many raids and forays, which have since come to pass."

"Such things could not take place under the United States government," asserted Burr.

"Nay, but we inherit the deathless hatred which those things engendered," returned Father Tobias.

"War is always a frightful thing," mused Burr.

"War!" ejaculated the other. "This thing is not war, Colonel Burr. You propose purchasing near Natchez, I hear, and becoming a planter in this section. 'T is well for you to recognize what foes are these Natchez folk we are called upon to deal with. It is possible for a man to go to till his field, leaving his cabin, as he thinks, amply protected, and to return to find his wife and babes murdered or driven away to a worse fate, and his home in flames. If Congress can and will take possession of this territory, and give wise assistance to such men as yourself and my good friend David Batchelor,—men who are trained in wars,—we may, perchance, within a few years make life more secure. There is a noble army of missionaries among mine own people who will, in God's good time, reach

the root of the matter. Once the Indian is converted to know the true God, we shall live beside him in peace and brotherly love."

"We will drench him with the gospel and dose him with leaden pellets, eh, Master Valentine? 'T is a brave mixture, and hath exterminated many a savage tribe."

Judge Bruin here entered with David Batchelor, booted, spurred, and mud-spattered from hard riding. Massawippa had no details of the proposed attack, but it was considered best that the planters be exhorted to remain on the alert, and those who felt themselves too weak to offer resistance should be advised to come into the settlement.

Four messengers were chosen—Nicholas Swazey, Abner Chew, Heritage Hamtranck, and Demler Dunn—to ride the four main routes from Natchez and warn the settlers. But it was considered that, the danger not appearing imminent, these warnings need not be given before the following day. Meantime, they would make all possible preparations to repel an attack. Batchelor proposed a plan for fortifying the bluff, which could then be used as a lookout. A line of earth and log breastworks was to run from a point near the river to the Valentine house. Bayou Pierre, as the most secure and easily defended point they had, was to be a depot of supplies and arms. With these latter they felt they were fairly well provided; the men of substance in the community had been most liberal in subscriptions for that purpose since Spain's attitude in regard to the San Lorenzo treaty had become a menace to the English-speaking residents of the province. After the arrest of a Baptist preacher named Hanna, ostensibly for an insult to the Spanish governor, and really because he had held public Protestant services in the open air, the Home Guard, under David

Batchelor, was looked to for defense from Spanish aggressions.

The men sat talking for hours. Batchelor drew out and spread upon the table a map of the district, with every plantation and cabin marked upon it. The situation of each, its liability to attack, its possibilities for defense—these points were brought up and weighed by them with the gravity of men who knew that they were dealing with matters of life and death.

From time to time, the judge signaled Cassius to replenish the fire in the great stone fireplace. Mistress Bruin came in, with a face of concern, curtsied to the gentlemen, talked apart with her husband, and left the room silently and in tears.

Outside the door they heard her daughter question her, and break into terrified sobbing at the reply.

"Gentlemen," said David, rising, when every possible point had been considered, " 't is now hard upon twelve of the clock; let us disperse. There is no immediate cause for alarm, I take it. At the proper time I will have these runners warned of their duty and sent forth."

"And you, Master Batchelor, must surely not ride back to 'The Meadows' this night," urged Judge Bruin. "Will you honor me by lying at my house? Mistress Bruin would be proud to have you. And she will feel vastly secure with so doughty a soldier added to our defense."

"I thank you and Madame Bruin, both," returned David, courteously. "We anticipate no attack tonight, yet the dwelling of my good pastor here lieth like an outpost fair in the path which the savages must take if they cross the river at the point which I apprehend they will choose. So, with your permission and his, I will accompany Master Valentine and remain with him."

When the three stepped into the hallway, Manteo, who was supposed to be waiting in his customary fashion to accompany Father Tobias home, was nowhere to be seen. Judge Bruin called the grinning Cassius, and bade him seek the Indian. He returned, grinning more broadly than before. "Indy-man done gone cl'ar 'way, massa. Cain' fin' 'im nowhuz," he declared.

"Well, mend the fire, you black rascal," concluded the judge. "Look to this log you have left here for me and my guests to break our shins over."

In the dim obscurity of the half-lighted hall, he gave the log a vigorous kick, and the log responded with a remonstrant grunt. It rolled over, and disclosed the blank, placid countenance of Manteo.

"Why, the fellow hath gone to sleep here in the hall! What aileth you? Get up!" Words failing to reach the sleeper, the judge interrogated him sharply with his foot.

Manteo arose, blinking and gaping, very far indeed from his usual stolid self. He lurched toward the doorway, remembered his gun, returned for it, tangled his feet, fell, and sat, in their astonished midst, chuckling foolishly.

"Manteo, are you ill?" inquired Father Tobias, laying his hand upon the Indian's head.

"No sick," gurgled the prostrate warrior. "Manteo heap happy. Manteo heap brave. Manteo eat up Natchez. Manteo eat up five-six hundred Natchez." He spread his brown fingers abroad and smiled fatuously upon them.

"Manteo, where have you been?" There was a long pause. "Have you been drinking anything?"

"Oh, yes," agreed Manteo. "Good black man give Manteo heap fire-water. Two cups fire-water. Jug fire-water. Barrel fire-water. Now Manteo eat up all Natchez," and he collapsed and slumbered.

"How shall we get this erring creature home?" Father Tobias inquired anxiously.

"He is welcome to remain where he is, if 't will relieve your anxieties, Master Valentine. But for my part—" and the judge's rage mounted. "Cassius! You black villain! Come here and pick up this unfortunate man, whom you have made drunk on my liquor, and carry him every step of the way to his home. Every step of the way, d' ye hear? See that you let him down not once."

"Iss, massa," said the now thoroughly terrified Cassius, and he made an abortive attempt to hoist Manteo upon his back.

The black, however, was short, and the Indian was not only long, but limp. Pried up at the center of his tall frame, his head and feet trailed upon the floor, and he presented so comical a picture that Burr and David, lacking the reasons of Judge Bruin and Father Tobias, the one for anger and the other for anxiety, burst into uncontrollable roars of laughter.

But Judge Bruin had not well bethought him of that proverb which assures us that it takes two to make a bargain. As the stout, squat, little black man propelled the loosely waving Manteo toward the door, that worthy, finding the method of travel unpleasing to him, and somewhat sobered by the proceedings, rose, shouldered his gun, and staggered down the path, Father Tobias and David following.

CHAPTER VIII

ESSOP lay sleeping peacefully in his bed, on that Sabbath evening when Father Tobias left him to go to Judge Bruin's.

Warming the room outside was a bright fire, which sparkled and snapped in the huge old chimney. It made of the peaceful interior a picture of comfort and cheerful homeliness. The dark-stained walls threw into relief rows of shining vessels of pewter and brass, while just above the table containing the Bible and other books of devotion hung the portrait of a fresh-faced woman, scarce out of girlhood. The slender throat, the deer-like head, and fearless long-lashed eyes were Joy's. About the firm mouth and haunting eyes hovered a wistful eagerness, and Joy's mother carried in her whole personality, as pictured here, the intangible essence of breeding, with a suggestion of the indomitable force, high courage, and truth which were so marked in impetuous, spiritual, brave Joyce Valentine.

Left alone, the girl sat down in her Sabbath trim to read the Book, but her thoughts, like her hair, were bright and rebellious, difficult to reduce to the Puritan primness which was her ideal.

The sight of Massawippa revived in her mind remembrance of a story which the old squaw had told her years ago. When Joyce was quite a child, Massawippa came often to the cabin with little gifts of fragrant

barks, or berries from the wood, pones of strange sweet bread made of coarse maize meal and whole chestnuts, and buckskin moccasins for Manteo or Father Tobias.

Joy, deprived of a mother's care, loved the strange, dark old woman, and was most devotedly loved by her. Massawippa used to take the slim, pale, bright-haired little girl upon her knee and, rocking and crooning, tell her Indian stories and legends.

The old squaw was not a Natchez. She seemed to be a drifting shred from some tribe farther east. But she had at one time lived with the Natchez, and the story which came vividly back to Joy's mind, as she sat, was that of a young Natchez princess, Stel-o-na, the beautiful daughter of the Chief White-apple. The home of White-apple was near the spot where the Valentine cottage now stood. His wigwam overlooked green fields of maize and tobacco, where the children and squaws labored all day long.

Then the French came. They were pleased with the corn, they learned from the Indians the use of tobacco. Then they demanded not only the crops themselves, but the fields upon which they were grown, and gave the rightful owners a month in which to depart.

The Natchez, finding that they were to be starved as well as exiled, determined to resist. They plotted to unite with the two other Indian tribes of the section and sweep every white-face from the land. Runners were sent to the Choctaws and Chickasaws, and a simultaneous uprising was prepared. A quiver of twenty arrows went to each tribe. One was to be withdrawn and broken every morning. At daybreak on the morning when the last of the twenty arrows should have been broken, the three tribes would attack simultaneously, sharing the spoils.

The quiver of the Natchez was deposited in the Tem-

ple of the Sun, and each day the priest, or medicine-man, was to burn one of the arrows in the sacred fire.

But Stel-o-na had seen and loved a young lieutenant of the French, the 'Sieur de Mace. Now she was in despair. Hoping to break the power of the three tribes by causing her own people to begin the attack ahead of time, she stole two of the arrows and destroyed them. The French easily repulsed the Natchez, fighting there alone without reinforcements, drove them back into their strongholds, and massacred them without mercy. Stel-o-na, fatally wounded, died in her lover's arms, protesting to the last that she died happy, since she had saved him and his people.

Joyce chided herself vainly for such worldly, not to say unseemly, musings upon the Sabbath evening. She opened her Bible at random, as was her custom, to find a text which should drive away these intrusive thoughts. And she read, "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave only to his wife."

Suddenly, the words were alive. It struck her as curious and beautiful that there was love other than divine love even in the Bible. Dropping the lids of the sacred book together again, it opened of itself, offering her, "And Ruth said, 'Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.'" The words were sweet, though Ruth was but speaking to her mother-in-law. Joy turned back to the beginning, and read the quaint little story through. She had always been taught that it was love of truth, seeking for the gospel, which led Ruth into far lands. Now a new light seemed to fall upon the story, illuminating it sentence by sentence, and she felt that a lover's waiting arms had drawn the widowed Ruth upon her travels. She closed the Book, and sat dreaming.

If the love of a man for a woman, or a woman for a man, did not come from God, where, she wondered, did it come from, or why came it at all? Jessop's words and intonations were recalled, and dwelt upon in detail. How much did they mean? How little?

Suddenly, a pleasant, quiet voice behind her shoulder said: "A penny for your thoughts, Mistress Valentine."

Joy turned, with a little shriek. Her patient, fully dressed—he had even shaved himself, though with unsteady hand—stood, looking tall and pale, in the doorway of his room.

She ran to him, drew him forward, and placed him in a chair before she spoke at all. "What a wicked, wicked, sinful thing for you to do," she cried, "to tempt Providence in such fashion!"

"Why, Mistress Joy," answered her patient, smilingly, "you yourself allowed that I might sit up next week."

"Next week! Aye, but next week is not to-night. Will you go back and lie down?" pleaded Joy. "Is your fever on again, think you?"

Jessop held out a submissive hand. Joy took the wrist between her fingers, and counted the beating of his pulse with much anxiety. "Nay," she said; "it is even and measured, though weak. But I would my father were here. I am afraid I do ill to let you run such risk."

"'T is little risk I run, Mistress Joy, so far as the body is concerned, though for the heart—that 's quite another matter."

"You should not say such things to me," returned Joy, reprovingly. "In the first place, you do not mean them, and lying is a mortal sin. And, in any case, it is very foolish and frivolous and unmeet to be speaking of these matters on a Sabbath evening."

Jessop burst out laughing. "Mistress Joy," he exclaimed, "I do protest that not all the coquettes in Christendom could make a man so determined to talk of love as one fair Puritan, who says he shall not. Now what, if an outcast sinner like myself may make inquiry, would you suggest as a suitable subject for Sabbath-day conversation? You counted my pulse; its beat comes from the heart, and also from that heart comes the love of which I speak. It appears to me that you theologians (you are a theologian, are you not, Mistress Joy?) are a mighty hair-splitting folk."

Because the stronger self within Joy answered to the youth and happiness and abandon in Jessop's tone, she replied to him the more austerely. "Here is the Book of all books, sir; we can surely find therein improving matter for conversation."

"What were you reading in it as I came forth, Mistress Joy?" inquired Jessop.

The girl's cheeks flung out their maiden banners of distress; white brow, and even neck and ears, were dyed as she turned her face away.

Jessop noted her confusion. "I warrant me," he cried, laughing boyishly and happily, "that you were sitting here, alone in the firelight, searching out every text on love which the dear old Book holds."

He leaned forward and caught the hand nearest him, as it hung listless by her side. "Turn round and face your judge, mistress; was 't not so?"

"Indeed, 't was not," Joy replied indignantly. "I do not mix my religion with worldliness and folly." Then, with her usual resolute honesty: "I opened the Book at random twice or thrice, to get rid of some very unwelcome thoughts, and those texts you mention came of themselves."

"Came of themselves! Of course they did, sweet-

ing; so they come always to those who are ready for them."

"I am not," protested Joy. "I am not looking for such things. I told you they were unwelcome—those thoughts I had."

Jessop sprang to his feet, dropping one arm lightly around her waist. With the other hand beneath her chin, he turned her face to his smiling one. "And those thoughts were of me!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "I know they were."

What more he would have said or done, Joy knew not, for she freed herself, remonstrating, "This is unseemly behavior, Master Jessop. I shall not remain with you to hear such words and be so treated."

"Forgive me," he pleaded anxiously and earnestly. "You have been so heavenly kind to a wretched outcast, who came like a beggar to your door, I made sure you were thinking of me."

"But I was not," returned Joy, naïvely. "I was thinking of another girl and her lover, of whom Massawippa told me, and wondering if I—if you—" she broke down in confusion.

Jessop would have been more or less than man could he have resisted a confession so childlike, so endearingly innocent. Ere she had done speaking, his arms were around her, and he had taken the kiss which was the ultimate object of all his jesting and badinage.

At the sound of footsteps approaching the door, the two started apart and faced each other. Joy was white and shaking with fury. That temper, which in her better moods she regarded as emanating straight from the evil one, had full possession of her now.

Jessop was flushed and triumphant, but a bit shamefaced, too, at sight of her passionate anger.

There was no time for speech between them before Father Tobias opened the door and ushered David in.

Manteo staggered after, and, unable to mount the stairway to the attic room, fell in a tangled heap beside it and slept.

The door was scarce closed behind the newcomers, when there came a gentle tapping, and David opened once more to admit Massawippa.

On the old squaw's face and in her manner was left nothing of Indian stolidity. She urged upon them to prepare immediately for defense, for that the attack might now come at any moment.

All speaking at once, they urged her to explain. She but reiterated her entreaties, her continual cry being that it was this cabin which was especially menaced; it was this household only which was threatened.

"How numbers the war party?" asked David. And she admitted, but confusedly, that so far as she knew it numbered but five.

The men were half disposed to laugh, and half inclined to be suspicious of this singularly exact information; but Joyce maintained passionately that they would do ill to distrust Massawippa, and pleaded the old woman's past faithfulness.

And so it was decided to follow the squaw's counsel. When the excitement over her news had abated, the men had leisure to observe that Jessop was up and dressed. Father Tobias was for having him hurried back to his bed, but David interposed, "Nay, if Master Jessop is able to load a rifle, though he be not strong enough to bear one, we would best let him stay."

In the hurry of preparation, all thought of that previous episode, all anger over the stolen kiss, was swept out of sight.

"Not fight—I?" cried Jessop. "I feel as well as ever I did in my life."

The heavy inner shutters were put in place. "Manteo should be in the attic to act as lookout," fretted

Father Tobias, "but I fear me he is not fit for the duty."

Jessop bent over the recumbent Indian, sniffed suspiciously, then raised his eyebrows in inquiry, glancing at David. "Cold water, taken exclusively, is a preventive of such seizure as this appears," he laughed; "and cold water, applied externally, is the best remedy known to bibulous man."

"Think you we can revive him?" questioned David, somewhat doubtfully.

"Methinks I have swum out of worse ports on cold water," Jessop rejoined.

"Here goes, then," agreed Batchelor, dragging the Indian toward Joy's immaculate kitchen. "I have pulled many a good fellow, limber as this, from under a table and pumped on him until he was a man again. I will apply the remedy, but do you hold him, Master Jessop, lest his recovery prove too demonstrative."

With much sousing, grunting, and splashing, and with sympathetic bursts of laughter from the two men, Manteo was brought finally to a condition in which he conjectured that the stairs were things meant for climbing.

He was then hoisted to his room and given a rifle, with the hope that, as he sobered more and more, he would be able to act with fair efficiency as lookout.

When the two men reached the lower room again, they found Father Tobias and Joyce continuing the defensive preparations. All the cabins of that time were built for such emergencies. The inner shutters were heavily loopholed, and so fastened as to be immovable from without. Joyce laid all the available weapons on her spotlessly scoured dining-table. She had placed a small kettle on the coals, and the ladle and bullet-molds, with the basin of water, were set forth near it.

"Is Manteo ill?" she inquired rather sternly of David. It was plain she suspected the cause of the Indian's condition.

"Well," remarked Jessop, before David could reply, "I warrant me there have been times when he hath felt better."

"What did you do to him?" pursued Joy.

"Faith, we doctored him, Mistress Valentine. We gave him the proper remedy. May I have a rifle? Cannot Mistress Joy load for three?" he queried.

"Are you a good shot?" asked David. "I myself am only fair. I lack practice."

"Manteo can hit a silver coin at a hundred paces," suggested Joy.

Jessop stole a humorous look at David, as they bent together over the guns. "That he will not this evening, Mistress Valentine," he finally observed. "'T is my belief he might make shift to hit a good, large barn-door, an the barn-door would be complaisant and hold quite still for him."

Joy looked at Jessop, and was filled with wonder. His eyes were bright, a glow of excitement supplied the flush of health on his cheek. She had no experience of men of his type, to whom danger and risk are as new wine. The men whom she knew best were brave; they faced awful danger, but they faced it soberly, counting the cost, and only in defense of home, wife, and children.

Jessop's dancing eyes roved gaily over the defenses. He seemed to regard the whole thing as a play prepared for his diversion. Suddenly, on the hushed hurry of their preparations fell a long-drawn, quivering cry. It might have been an owl, it might even have been a panther, though these latter seldom came close to the settlement now.

Joyce paused in her bullet-molding, ladle in hand,

while the bright molten drops dripped back into the kettle. "What was that?" she whispered.

Father Tobias murmured, "Hush! 'T will come again."

But it did not come again. They had begun once more to move stealthily, their nerves still tensely strained, listening for the cry. There was a soft thud upon the door, as though a feather-bed had been thrown against it. Then a voice moaned, "O Tobias, dear Tobias! It 's me, only me. Please let us in. I do yearn to help take care of you."

Before the first sentence ended Father Tobias and Joy had recognized the voice. But it was David Batchelor who took away the prop and opened the door to usher in Sister Loving Longanecker and her daughter Patience.

"The Lord in his mercy be praised!" she gasped, blinking at the light. Then she turned upon Batchelor volubly: "Ye sent for me to bring the child to the man Bruin's, and so—"

"What!" broke in David. "You have not brought the child here?"

A sturdy boy of four, son of a countryman of David's, and left to his care by the death of both parents, was fast asleep in Patience's arms.

"Aye, that have we," answered Sister Loving, stoutly. "When we got to Bruin's house there was Miss wringing of her hands and weeping, and Madame no whit better. They told us 't was feared there were Indians abroad. They said you had come here. And Patience says to me, says she, 'Mummy, we must go to be a sword and buckler to dear Pastor Valentine.'"

Sister Loving ogled Father Tobias coyly. It became evident to Jessop, as she proceeded with her rambling narrative of their terror and the dangers which had beset their journey to the Valentine's, that the

elder woman was in the habit of representing herself as a mere puppet in the hands of her daughter.

"Patience says, says she, 'Mummy, take your gun, because if we meet any of the Indians ye 'll need it,' says she." Poor Patience—small, meek, frightened, with slightly retreating chin and protruding eyes—listened while her great, gaunt parent added: "And me that 's so 'feared of a gun."

"Tut, tut, Sister Loving!" interrupted Pastor Valentine, impatiently. "You can shoot truer than any other woman of our Society, and well you know it. Let Patience lay the boy upon the settle and care for him. Take you this loophole to guard. It sweeps the whole east hill. Mind you keep a sharp lookout, and speak never a word."

"If he hath a mind to do slow murder, he hath gone the right way about it," whispered Jessop, in a gleeful aside to David. "Methinks that latter command will surely finish the grenadier in petticoats."

Silence fell in the little room. Again every nerve was stretched like a violin string. The firelight flared and glinted on the wall. The child, after some drowsy protests, slumbered on his hastily spread couch of blankets.

Jessop turned occasionally from his post to snatch a hasty glance at Joy, where she sat on a low stool by the hearthside, molding bullets. Ever, when the flame dropped low, its scattered brightness seemed to muster on that down-bent, red-gold head. Her face showed, serious and attentive, but not terrified. The color was in her curved lips, and a little flush from the heat of the fire painted the warm whiteness of her cheek. She was molding excellent bullets, one could see that. Joy's bullets would be true in time of need, just as her prayers would be in time of spiritual stress. When the boy stirred she quieted him with an adroit hand.

How different was she from any feminine thing which had come into Jessop's life before. History renews often enough its proofs that the women of the *grande monde* can meet suffering unmoved, that they know how to laugh in the teeth of disaster, and smile upon the front of death. But it is pain and danger thrust upon them which evoke this fortitude, this heroism. But Joy—danger, hardship, renunciation were her familiars, made so willingly and freely for her father's sake.

It was not in the blood of a man like Jessop to regard a daughter of the people as other than legitimate prey. Yet, thrown in the society of Joyce Valentine in a manner which to his aristocratic ideas seemed the crude familiarity of peasant life, he had never been able to assume toward her other than a respectful mental attitude. He doggedly refused to admit to himself that she was his equal. To wife with her were impossible—but well he knew that she was his superior.

He beheld her now—strong hands, intelligent face, brave eyes that looked at danger unflinchingly. Somehow, the sight brought to him the vision of one at home in England, a very great lady as the world counts greatness, young and beautiful too, even as Joyce was beautiful. He wondered smilingly what would she think of Joyce Valentine; and what—good faith!—would she do at such a push as this? She, with her first tiring-woman and her second tiring-woman, and her spaniel, which must have its own attendant, her silken hose, her heelless kid sandals, her multitudinous smelling-bottles, and her affected horror at anything real, natural, or human!

With a whispered laugh, he once more leaned to his lookout. What mattered it? One of these women was dead to him, and the other was near and fair and kind.—But was she kind?

For the first time there entered his mind a creeping doubt of his ability to take this feminine fortress, so oddly garrisoned with defenses quite new to him. "Say I offered her marriage," he communed with himself. "And then, if the succession falls to me—by God, why not?" He turned to glance once more. Their mutual danger had brought Joy nearer to him than ever before. "She looks every inch a countess," he said. "And for courage, not one of them can touch her."

CHAPTER IX

AVID was stationed at a loophole across the corner from that guarded by Jessop. Now he leaned forward and touched the other on the shoulder. "Think you," he said, "the Indian above is too drunk to keep guard? Will they be upon us unawares?"

"I fear so," answered Jessop.

Massawippa had stolen unnoticed from her place at the fireside. She crept up the ladder-like stair, and stood in the bare little attic room. It was even as the men had anticipated. Manteo lay sprawled across his gun and snoring. The squaw crouched at the loophole to watch in his place.

Out of the silence came the cry of Joy's wildcat, Satan, suing at the back door for admission. It struck on the strained nerves of the little band like a blow. They jarred vividly to it. Despite the remonstrances of David and Father Tobias, who were well versed in that Indian ruse of imitating the cry or call of wild animal and bird, Joy, insisting that she knew her Satan's voice, opened the low little door and let him in. The gray, streaked creature sprang to her lap, purring, its broad frilled face alive with love and gratitude, its green eyes glowing, as it rubbed its head against her breast.

Again for a weary hour there was but the purring of the cat, the whispering of the fire, a murmur from

the sleeping child, or the uneasy sighing of Sister Loving, as some idea which she might not express swelled big within her.

Faithful, awakening out of a dream of mice and unlimited cream, arose from her basket and stretched herself luxuriously. Suddenly her one yellow eye encountered the hated Satan, seated aloft in state and being made much of. A thunderous growl from the cat, as unfeminine as Sister Loving's tones were low and sweet, greeted the odious sight.

Patience, who had been kneeling by her mother, arose at the sound, and, tiptoeing gently across the room, crouched at Joy's side. The bullets were molded, and Joy had put them upon the table along with the two spare guns, ready to reload for the men at the loopholes. Father Tobias called softly to Faithful, and the growling ceased.

On the perfect stillness which followed there came a sound, muffled but distinct—the three raps on the floor above. It was Manteo's signal, as agreed upon. Jessop's blood tingled, and the red came into his fagged, weary face. Patience moaned and clung to Joy's skirts, hiding her face. None of the watchers at the loopholes could see anything approaching, though the night was clear and starlit.

Above, Manteo still slumbered drunkenly. The signal had came from Massawippa, who, from her outlook over the door, had caught sight of a stealthy movement in the edge of the cane-brake.

Again and yet again something stirred. Finally a dark form stole a few paces into the open toward the black, silent little hut. It was joined by another and another, till there were five figures in view. As she watched them, apparently consulting together in regard to their next move, she made desperate efforts to pull Manteo's gun from under him, or to rouse him that

he might shoot. But Manteo was like a drugged creature, and she finally got the weapon in her own hands, aimed it as best she could, and fired. Her shot was the signal for a yell and a rush toward the cabin.

Roused at last by the sound of firing and the familiar war-whoop, Manteo struggled up and grappled with the thing which he conceived to be his adversary. Savagely, again and again, he struck Massawippa. As best she might, she parried and evaded the blows, but never returned them. To and fro they swayed, the squaw whispering, "Massawippa, Massawippa! Manteo—*Massawippa!*"

But Manteo either did not hear her, or, hearing, did not care. His drunken fury blinded him to the peril of their position.

The first rush brought one of the besiegers within range of Sister Loving's rifle. Ah, Sister Loving—Sister Loving, of the tender heart, the piping voice, the warrior soul, and the keen, true aim! She belied her name by waiting until the man was within point-blank range, and then firing with a steady hand.

"One wicked heathen gone," she remarked in dove-like tones, tossing the gun backward to Patience and reaching for the fresh rifle which that astute young woman knew better than not to have waiting for her mother's hand.

As Sister Loving's eye came back to the loophole she cried out with dissatisfaction, for her Indian was up and limping off. She sent another shot after him, which failed of effect.

Sister Loving's victim had approached the house on the east, the side farthest from the river. Next to Mistress Longanecker, and commanding the northern outlook, stood Jessop. As the wounded savage reached the cane-brake, a companion bounded out, and, circling westward to avoid the fate of his predecessor, passed

Jessop's loophole at a swift run. Jessop's nerves were as steel, and his heart leaped exultantly. It was like shooting at a fleeing pheasant on a Scotch moor. He felt the same elation and no remorse as, with a clean shot, he bowled his man over. And this Indian lay quite still; he did not rise again.

"Didst git 'im?" inquired Mistress Longanecker. At Jessop's nod, she continued ruefully: "Well, you 've the lead o' me, then. I grassed mine, but he got away."

A rifle shot rang out clear and loud, and a bullet cried past Mistress Longanecker's ear. Her fatal propensity for conversation had caused the momentary neglect of her outlook.

Father Tobias was kneeling by the south door, to bring his eye on a level with its loophole. The bullet struck the stones above the fireplace and was deflected, wounding him slightly in the head.

As Mistress Longanecker saw her beloved Tobias sink to the floor, she leaped up with a yell. Turning to Patience, she bellowed in her reserve voice, which was to her usual tones as a hurricane to a summer zephyr: "*Shut—your—mouth!*"

"Why, mummy," whimpered her daughter, "I hain't opened it."

"But ye were a-goin' to. Y' know ye were a-goin' to," screamed her irate parent, as she ran to where Father Tobias was already striving to rise.

David and Jessop stuck to their respective positions, and shouted to Mistress Longanecker to stick to hers. Manteo alone, David said, would be sufficient protection for the south front, though Master Valentine was down.

But the sister heeded nothing, not even the voice of her dearly beloved Tobias, as he protested that he was scarcely scratched. Struggling to his feet, he sought to evade her onslaught. She flung herself

down before him and clasped his knees, volleying forth praises and hosannas for his deliverance. "And Patience says to me, says she, 'O dear Master Tobias, are you sure you 're not hurt no worse than what ye think ye are?' Just lean right down on me, and I 'll help ye over to the settle."

Father Tobias was in an agony of impatience to get back to his unguarded door. "Let me go, my good soul; pray let be. Calm thyself, dear Sister Loving! Let me go, I say, good Mistress Longanecker."

And as Father Tobias withdrew first one foot and then the other from her toils, stepping high lest perchance he tread upon his supplicant, and inching mincingly toward his old station at the south door, the graceless Jessop was irresistibly reminded of the antics of a reverend old crane.

"O-o-oh, he called me dear!" hosannahed Mistress Loving. "And Patience says to me, says she, 'I do love Joy like a sister, er-ready.' "

Father Tobias was by no means extricated, and his reckless use of words had emboldened Sister Longanecker to block his path anew. Manteo, above, whom Jessop and David supposed to be guarding the south approach, was still wrestling with Massawippa for his gun.

There were but three of the five Indians left active in the field. These, finding that they were not fired upon from the south side of the dwelling, came boldly up, and two of them, under the direction of the third, who seemed to be the leader, raised a log of firewood—a monster back-log which lay beside the door-stone—and, using it as a battering-ram, at one blow drove the door inward.

Master Valentine, Sister Longanecker and Patience were all knocked down by the falling door, while the sleeping child, rudely awakened, crouched sobbing on

the settle. Jessop and David both fired into the open doorway, and succeeded in driving off the two Indians who had used the log.

But the savage who had been directing them leaped into the open doorway and, brandishing his tomahawk, sprang across the room toward Joy, as she stood at the table absorbed in loading and handing the extra guns.

The weapons of both Jessop and David were empty. Father Tobias had not yet extricated himself from the fallen door and Sister Loving's scarcely less formidable endearments. A moment more, and the whirling tomahawk would descend, when suddenly, like a gray streak, Satan launched himself, all teeth and claws, full in the Indian's face.

The savage leaped back, unprepared for such war methods in the cabin of a white medicine-man. Joyce wheeled, flung up the loaded rifle she held ready to pass to whichever defender might need it first, and fired instantly, filling the room with smoke and uproar.

The man trembled and sank to one knee. Then, with a wrench, he rose to his feet and started off at a sort of shambling run.

David leaned forward, snatched a rifle from the table, and shot him as he ran.

"O Master Batchelor!" remonstrated Joyce, from the end of the settle, against which the gun's recoil had flung her. "He was a very wicked man. Perchance, had you let him live, he might have repented."

"Let him repent in hell," groaned Batchelor, between his shut teeth. "Are you hurt, Joy? Did he strike you?"

"No," said Joy, turning to recover and reload the empty gun.

Jessop had run forward, and was attempting to lift the heavy door from Father Tobias. Weakened by

his long illness, however, his strength proved unequal to the task.

David laid his hand upon the table, and, vaulting lightly over it, added his exertions, and the door was soon in place. Father Tobias was lifted to the couch.

"We must back to our loopholes, must we not?" queried Jessop, in a hurried undertone.

"I think the fight is over," replied David. "I believe there were but a half-dozen of our assailants, and we have lamed or wounded three or four."

"Manteo should be all the lookout that we need now," said Jessop. "But," as they peered once more from the various outlooks, "though he gave the signal, yet he let two or three approach the door."

"Belike he is too drunk to see them. Methought I heard a struggle up there while we fought down here," commented David.

"And where is Massawippa?" asked Joy. She had taken the child in her arms, and was hushing him gently as she spoke. Sister Loving was once more in close attendance upon the pastor—an attendance with which it appeared he would have gladly dispensed.

Suddenly there came to the ears of those below a yell, the sound of a struggle, and of a shutter being torn away above-stairs.

They believed for a moment that one of the besiegers had, in some manner inexplicable to them, climbed to Manteo's window and, breaking in its defense, attacked the drunken Indian as he lay.

What really had occurred was this: The attacking party actually consisted of but five Indians. They were led by a tall man who was not a Natchez, but spoke, instead, in a dialect which the four Natchez, his companions, seemed at times to find difficult of comprehension. This man David had shot. The others, in departing, followed a custom not uncommon in these

Indian forays, which were more for purposes of robbery than in the way of ordinary warfare. Firing a well-seasoned torch, they threw it upon the roof of the cabin as they fled to the shelter of the canes. The sight of it as it whirled past the loophole sobered Manteo, and the sound of it, as it sputtered and crackled upon the shingles, caused him to release his grasp upon Massawippa.

Well he knew that the hand which threw that brand was waiting, if it blazed undisturbed, to complete the work of murder and destruction.

He wrenched loose the fastenings of the window shutter. "Massawippa go," pleaded the squaw. "Manteo no be killed. Massawippa heap like be shot." She sank down and clung to his feet.

Turning, he struck savagely at the upturned, pleading face, and climbed through the window.

Outside, the light of the torch made him a fair target for lurking foes, but this was not enough for Manteo's bravado, fed by the liquor he had consumed and roused to white heat by a sudden realization of the fact that, while others had defended the cottage and slain some of its besiegers, he had wasted his time and strength upon a wretched squaw.

Grasping the flaming brand, he stood erect, and, swinging it above his head, yelled a defiance at the unseen enemy. His taunt was promptly answered by the crack of a rifle from the edge of the cane-brake; Manteo, torch in hand, fell headlong from the roof's edge, dropped in a shapeless heap in front of the barricaded door, and the extinguished torch scattered a circle of sparks beside him.

The sounds of all this came to those below. "What is to do?" cried Father Tobias, sitting up and pushing aside Sister Loving's too ardent ministrations.

" 'T is a feint to draw us out, belike," said Patience.

" 'T was even so they did when they fired Prudence Rideout's house and burned it over her head."

" 'Pears to me," said her mother, "that I smell fire somewhur beside the fireplace."

Father Tobias, climbing the stairs, met poor Massawippa creeping down. "Manteo!" she gasped, and pointed to the front of the house.

"Was 't he who fell?" inquired Jessop. "Is he out there?" And Joy ran to unbar the door.

"Have a care, Mistress Joy," cried David; "neither of our loopholes can defend you. If 't is a feint, as seemeth likely, you will be shot as soon as you open the door."

Joy was too good a frontierswoman to run needless risks. "We know," she said, "that they are very few —not enough to make a rush. Do you, or Master Jessop, guard the opening. If Manteo be indeed without, we must help him."

As became afterward apparent, the besieging Indians had, in the death of Manteo, accomplished their purpose, and the three who survived the encounter had gone, taking their dead with them.

The door was opened, and Manteo's body dragged inside without interference. His seared right hand and the extinguished torch told their own tale of heroism.

"Is the roof fired?" inquired David, and the squaw shook her head. She had waited to see that the shingles were not ignited before putting the heavy window shutters back in place.

Seating herself on the floor, she took the dead Indian's head in her lap and began a sort of crooning or wailing, inexpressibly desolate and heart-moving.

Father Tobias attempted some words of comfort, and to them she answered, speaking in her native tongue, which he then found, with surprise, was Manteo's own musical Cherokee.

"White Father," she said, "this brave was my man. I served and followed him in the wars and on the hunting-trail for ten years before he met the White Father and learned to believe in the White Father's Manitou. When it came that the White Father and the little Day Star were leaving the land where Manteo was born, to come to this far and barren country, Manteo went with them.

"Massawippa would fain have gone too, but Manteo said, 'No. In that far country, the White Father needs a brave to defend him, not a squaw to be a burden upon him,' and he drove me away with hard words. Then Massawippa followed day and night. Day and night she followed, and kept the little boat in view. When the White Father built this house, Massawippa stayed with the Natchez and with the Chickasaws. She became an outcast, and wandered from tribe to tribe and from camp to camp. Manteo was angry when he saw her face. Yet sometimes, when he hunted or fished, he gave poor Massawippa meat because she had once been his squaw and had been faithful."

Jessop and David, who were at the loopholes again, guarding the cottage, listened to this extraordinary story, David translating to the other as she spoke. "Faith! 't is not the first time by many," whispered Jessop, with a whimsical grimace, "that a man hath fed two families."

Massawippa turned her hopeless eyes to the men at the loopholes. "Tell them," she said to Father Tobias, "that they need watch no more. It was Manteo's ancient enemy, Amehota. He had followed from the Land of the Rising Sun, swearing to take Manteo's scalp, and now that he knows Manteo is dead he will be swift upon the trail home."

"Methought 't was some such thing," said David, as

he laid his gun upon the table. " 'T is no general uprising; there were but five of the villains."

"Forgive me, O White Father!" begged Massawippa, "that I told you not this thing—that I spoke words with a double meaning. Had I told you otherwise, you would have cast Manteo out, that you might live in safety."

"Why, not so, sister," remonstrated Father Tobias. "The white man, who serves the Great Spirit, does not desert a brave in his time of need." But the old squaw, her unseeing eyes raised, had gone back to her desolate chanting over the dead husband who had in his lifetime despised and cast her off.

"Women are curious creatures," murmured Jessop to David. "Without regard to color, a gun-butt or a doubled fist, judiciously used, seems ever to open up the way to their affections. Think you not 't is so?"

David, the boy in his arms, laughed. The child stirred sleepily, and put up a loving hand to stroke the man's face. "What Dabie laugh for?" he inquired.

CHAPTER X

APTUROUSLY dawned the morning after the uprising—that uprising which rose to so inconsiderable a height. The sky arched above the glad earth with an intense blueness. Sunshine sifted in great patches of gold through the bare trees which stood like sentinels about the exposed front of the little cabin. There was frost, but no stress of cold in the January air. A light breeze played a delicate reed-like monotone through the pale-columned cane that curved in a close phalanx about the sides of Father Tobias's homestead.

To Joyce, who stood, an incarnation of the new day, among her flocks, it sounded like a requiem. It minded her of the poor dead Indian back in the little cabin, whose life, however useless in the living, went out in an act of courage and self-sacrifice.

Her cheek wore its usual clear pallor, and dark shadows, wrought by anxiety and fatigue, added depth to her gray eyes. There was a serious beauty about the whole face. She seemed in accord with the strong sunlight and the blue sky, the wind, with its breath of early morning and its smell of vigorous, earthy things, drawn up from the source of all life. The note which was brave and dominant in the girl's personality chorded harmoniously with the new day.

Jessop stood unobserved and watched her, first from

the cabin window and then from the doorway. His thoughts were not altogether sweet. The stimulation of last night's danger, being evaporated, showed him decidedly the worse for his long and serious illness. To him the six weeks had been like six months, for, with all his nonchalance and seeming indolence, Jessop was preëminently a man of action.

Joy had been struck, during the terrible strain of the night previous, by his gauntness of contour. She was not apt to sentimentalize over a convalescent, man or woman. But to her there was something touching in the thin, elegant figure, rather under than above the ordinary height, so recently helpless from illness, yet keeping doggedly at its post, thrusting back weakness and exulting in untried perils.

He was like the bare outline of a man hung with misfit clothes. But though gaunt and haggard, he felt himself well enough at last to possess no further excuse for inaction. The girl, in her fresh vigor, undaunted by the night's dangers, shamed him. He strolled out to where, back in the little clearing, a poultry-yard had been inclosed; the chickens and ducks and geese, tender objects of Joy's solicitude, were breakfasting.

"Shame there, Yellow-neck! don't be greedy," Joyce cried, and, lifting her narrow, short stuff gown, she "shooed" the encroacher away. "Pretty-bill, thou art ever generous and forgiving," she added, stooping to smooth the portly speckled hen, which was clucking amicably, in perfect willingness to share her meal with the returning Yellow-neck. Joy laughed. "I 'll e'en spare my bad words, Pretty-bill; you must take care of your own breakfast."

Manteo's great wolf-dog had crept in among the fluttering chickens and curled himself, with a desolate whine, at her feet. "Poor Toka," she said softly, "you must find another master now."

Old Faithful, Father Tobias's monster cat, crouched blinking on the fence. Faithful loved the cabin and Father Tobias. Joy she tolerated, though that young woman's frenzied upheavals in behalf of cleanliness often worked woe to her feline soul. But Manteo and Manteo's dog had been her twin abominations, and she kept her one eye fixed in baleful scrutiny upon Toka, as he lay at her young mistress's feet. Faithful's crippled vision had first commended her to that pity in gentle Father Tobias's heart which is akin to love.

From her benign, merciful old father, Joy had inherited the bounteous nature which in her became so largely maternal. From the time of their advent in the Mississippi cane-brake, where, with dauntless faith, Tobias Valentine builded his temple in the wilderness, Joy had always a larger or smaller brood of detrimental wayfarers of the hairy and feathered tribes, which, yielding to an adverse fate, had fallen by the wayside. An ailing chicken, a crippled rabbit or wounded bird, called irresistibly upon the mother instinct in the girl's complex nature.

Once, when a nest of infantile snakelets had been unearthed, after Manteo's neat and conclusive despatch of the mother snake, Joy stood a moment eying them wistfully. She had a shuddering fear of all crawling things, but their helplessness made its instant appeal.

"Ugh! No pet snake," quoth the Indian. "Snake like Huron. Sting friend. Eat chicken. Manteo kill 'im now; kill 'im sure." And the girl, barely fifteen, covering eyes and ears, fled to the house while the butchery went on.

Satan, a mere kitten, remained in the track of a storm of shot and powder which cleared a woodland near by of many dangerous beasts. "Poor kitty, he was left, mayhap, for some wise purpose," cooed Joy, "and I 'll mother the poor baby." Last night gave Satan,

as well as Manteo, his chance, and he had paid his debt to the young foster mother.

"Faith, fair Mistress Joy," Jessop called, as he contemplated the girl and her flock, "you thrifty birds put worms like me to the blush. 'T were some salving to my conscience were you less intent on catching them at this hour."

"Good day, Master Jessop," returned Joy, demurely. "You may have seen it writ large in copy-books, 'Procrastination is the thief of time.' Was that, pray, what brought you out so early?"

Jessop looked upon the pretty picture she made, surrounded by her feathered dependents, all straining eagerly, as is the wont of their betters, to pick up the biggest crumbs.

"Is there aught about the cottage I could do to help you?" he inquired, with diffident abruptness.

"You are not strong enough to work, are you?" deprecated Joy, kindly.

"I should have doubted it myself yestermorn; but, holy blue! Mistress Valentine, what right hath a man with not one cent in his pocket to fine gentleman airs? I must e'en to work, and pay my score."

Joy turned toward him a face in which the brightness was quite dashed. Jessop's bitterness, his ungracious outbursts, always wounded her deeply, but she answered steadily: "I applaud your decision, sir. 'If a man will not work, neither shall he eat.' "

" 'T is a frequent text with you, Mistress Joy, and a true saying as well," agreed Jessop. "I may work and die; but I shall not live and beg."

Joy was overcome with swift remorse. "You surely know I meant no such thing as that. My father is most willing that you be provided at his table with material food, and both of us long earnestly to feed you with that spiritual bread without which the body itself

faileth. O Master Jessop, would that I could show you how good a thing it is!"

She had approached him, her eager eyes alight, her red lips apart. Jessop looked at her a trifle whimsically. She was, he thought, the embodiment of youth and love; and these (to him) canting phrases seemed quaintly incongruous from such lips. But it was clear that his best chance for holding Joy's attention as a lover was to present himself as an interesting penitent; so, with some effort, he drew a long face and professed a desire to hear more.

The young enthusiast was delighted. "My father will be so happy!" she said. Joy's private opinion was that nobody who listened to her Father Tobias could resist him, and she looked upon their penitent as already saved.

"Nay, Mistress Joy," insinuated Jessop, "your father is a very busy man. Many depend on him. If you could give me instruction 't would perchance be better."

"Oh, I shall!" agreed Joy. "I think now of so many things I wish to say to you, but one word of father's is worth ten of mine. His ministrations are always blessed. It discourages me sometimes, for you know I humbly believe myself called. I look forward —my poor life is consecrated to the preaching of the Word."

Jessop's face wore an expression of strong disrelish, but, warned and disciplined somewhat by former interviews, he forbore remonstrances.

" 'T is a beautiful hope to look forward to," finished Joy, innocently.

"Would you rather be a Methody preacher in the wilderness here, than a lady, such as you are fitted to be, with title and wealth, the world at your feet and a man at your command who loved only you?"

"Yes," asserted Joy, with the prompt finality of

complete ignorance, the certainty of the untempted. "These worldly things of which you speak be but husks which starve the soul."

"Husks, are they?" inquired Jessop, as he followed her toward the house. "Then you think, do you, Mistress Joy, that this gospel you offer me is the kernel of the matter?"

"It is the seed of eternal life," declared Joy, seriously and sweetly. "I long inexpressibly to see you lay hold upon it. Master Jessop, my soul loveth thy soul. Yea, I could say to thee as Jacob said to the angel, 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me.' Even so cannot I see you depart from among us till you have blessed our ministrations by accepting the truth."

What an impossible girl! Jessop would have said that such words from such lips could excite only amusement in him; yet now he found the tears in his eyes at the innocent kindness of the young creature.

"Mistress Joy," he said, with a quick impulse, and it was as though another spoke rather than himself, "I do believe in your true concern for me. I have had little love in my life. I have been fawned upon, I have been cajoled. God knows I was always a ready enough tool to any who sought so to use me. I have been indulged madly by those who—who cast me off when I wounded their pride; but as for such pure love as this of which you speak, I have known naught of it. Meseems that for its sake a man might do anything, be anything, you desired."

"Not that I desired," returned Joy, with some gentle reproof in her tone—"that God desires."

"Oh, but the instrument," urged Jessop. "Surely I remember hearing you say that God works through instruments?"

"Yea," answered Joy, "and I should feel blessed among women to be that instrument."

It trembled on his lips to say there could be none fairer nor sweeter, but the sight of Mistress Longanecker in the doorway—they had paused, in the earnestness of their speech, before again entering the cabin—checked their conversation.

" 'What, ho! Is the good dame dancing mad? Hath she been bitten by a tarantula?' " quoted Jessop. Mistress Longanecker signaled them with incomprehensible gestures and grimaces, as she pointed to the room behind her, which appeared to contain the cause of her perturbation. Joy hurried forward alone, and Jessop, following more slowly, saw her enter and greet Ambrose Gibson and Glass Parkinson, two of the stewards of the Society. These two and Father Tobias were in earnest conversation.

"He was a brother in Christ and a member of our Society," insisted Master Gibson.

"He was this woman's husband," corrected Pastor Valentine. " 'Whom God hath joined, let not man put asunder.' "

Massawippa, shrunken and fallen together from grief, her long vigil, and abstinence from food, sat at the dead Indian's head, moaning softly. Her bleared eyes were raised, fixed and sightless, to the ceiling. Her face was seamed and creased and marred. The weather-beaten dwelling of her strong, patient soul was well-nigh ruinous. It had been raftered and roofed with hardship, clapboarded with abnegation, the nails driven deep by the hammer of necessity—fate.

"It is not seemly," asserted Glass Parkinson, a tall, gray, angular old man, "that heathen rites be done upon the body of one who hath accepted Christ as his salvation."

"I can see no sin," persisted the pastor, with gentle obstinacy, "in giving the body of this man to his wife. I shall call the Society together and hold the

burial service here in this house at sunset. Two of this woman's people have promised to come at moonrise to bear the body away and inter it according to their ancient customs."

"In death, every man goeth to his own gods," said David's voice from the doorway. He came forward, laid a hand on Father Tobias's shoulder, looked smilingly from one to other of the two stewards, and added: "Content ye, my friends. A creed is a thing for a man to live by."

"Perchance ye 're right, Master Batchelor," debated Gibson, thoughtfully. "I warrant ye, 't were better for the world that more folk lived by their creeds, rather than put them off as a thing to die by."

"That 's what Patience says," agreed Sister Loving, in her plaintive treble. "She says to me, Patience says, 'Mommy, if there was more folks in the Society that minded their own business and let other folks' business alone, 't would be a sight better.' "

This highly relevant comment was received in absolute silence by all save Jessop, who, in the hope of hearing more, agreed courteously.

"Now, Brother Gibson and you, Brother Parkinson, ye 're not women." The men so distinguished looked extremely uncomfortable, but were fain to admit the truth of her statement. And Jessop whispered to Joy, "That leaves your father, Master Batchelor, and myself unclassified."

"Ye 're not women; neither of ye knows, as Patience says to me, says she, what 't is to be a wife," the sister went on. "Now, here 's our good pastor; he hath been wedded once," she caressed the numeral with a tender emphasis, and lingered upon it as though to suggest that the same thing might happen again, and the two stewards, who were themselves husbands and heads of families, glanced at each other, exchang-

ing something very like a smile, in spite of their austerity.

"Brother Gibson, Brother Parkinson, will ye help me to call the Society together for the burial service?" interposed Pastor Valentine, and, stepping outside with the two men and David, he left Sister Loving assuring the irresponsive Massawippa that she, Sister Loving, knew just how it all was, and could appreciate her sufferings.

Statements as to what Patience said, tender commendations of Father Tobias, and random references to almost every subject which nobody would have mentioned made up the balance of Sister Loving's discourse.

The cabin was speckless and ordered, through Mistress Longanecker's ministrations. "She is so good," deprecated Joy, "that you must forgive her innocent eccentricities."

Jessop, to whom the remark was addressed, drew his mouth down at the corners with mock solemnity. "I will forgive her everything," he said, "till she dowereth me with her affections, even as she doth our good, unsuspecting Father Tobias."

"Fie!" exclaimed Joy, though the dimples about her mouth belied the seriousness of her reproach; "she is, as I am sure she herself could tell you, a better woman than you will ever be."

Jessop's complaisant humor held throughout the day. His black mood of self-torment and bitterness, which Joy had come to recognize in her weeks of nursing and care for him, kept itself quite aloof. He insisted upon helping her, awkwardly it is true, with all her tasks, saying in explanation that, Manteo being gone, he considered himself man-of-all-work, and begged most earnestly to be so considered by her.

"I have turned a new leaf, Mistress Joy," he assured

her. "And at the head of that new leaf is inscribed, 'The most humble and obedient—and loving—servant to command of Mistress Joyce Valentine.' Signed: 'Charles Edward Mountfalcon a' Jessop.' "

Joy smiled. "And I have only one small name," she commented. " 'T is the custom of our Society. The giving of more names than one is counted a worldly frivolity." She sighed a little, for his amplitude of title carried an elegant suggestion.

" 'T is a matter which may be mended," hinted Jessop. "I myself have one which I—" he caught himself back in mid-speech, and hesitated. He had begun in gentle badinage, and he ended with a passionate earnestness which surprised and annoyed, rather than pleased him.

"Mind ye tell the bees, Joy," cautioned Mistress Longanecker, as she tied on her hood preparatory to departure. "Oh, 't is nothing to smile at. The bees must be told, or you will lose them. Mind, about the edge of the evening, when they be all hived, go ye and strike upon the hive—strike gently—and they will answer by their buzzing. Patience says, says she, that will mean, 'What is 't?' or 'What want ye?' Says ye then, softly, 'Manteo be dead.' "

She gathered her shawl about her. "Patience," she called, her voice dropping to the heavy bass note it sometimes took in moments of excitement, usually directed toward her meek daughter, "come on, and step brisk. Ye know well enough I 'm afeard to go home alone."

The idea of Sister Longanecker being "afeard" of anything, man or beast, struck Jessop as so comical that he laughed immoderately. And when the gentle Patience, she of the bulging eye and the recessive chin, meek fount of opinion for her drastic parent, came trundling by, rifle upon shoulder, he laughed the more.

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"What is 't about the bees?" he asked Joy. "Shall you really tell them?"

She opened her clear eyes very wide. "Heard ye not, Master Jessop, that I said I would?"

"Aye, but saying and doing are oft quite different things," smiling.

"With the world's people, yes. But with us—with me—a promise is held sacred."

"Heaven send, then, that you make me a promise, Mistress Joy, some day, since you are so faithful in the keeping of them," he returned, and was again vexed at the fervor in his own tones.

When this mood was upon him, Joy felt a vague distrust of both Jessop and herself. She hastened to say: "I have never told the bees, because we have not before been visited by death. But the country people hereabout say—and perchance 't is true, for God made the bees too and gave them their wisdom—that they will not prosper unless you love them and tell them of your joys and sorrows. 'T is held that if you fail to do this they will leave you and swarm elsewhere, or, grieved at your coldness, perish in the hive."

All day, as the usual household affairs went forward, Massawippa sat motionless, the only sign of life she gave the low, moaning chant which sometimes rose to a wail and sometimes dropped to a whisper. Toka raised his head from the door-stone at intervals, and added a long-drawn, despairing howl.

"Faith," said Jessop, finally, "if this thing keeps up much longer, I shall be ready to be buried myself by nightfall." The neighbors were in and out, and their direct and rather distressing comments did little to soothe his irritated nerves.

Delight Dunn, after quoting unnecessarily pointed passages of Scripture for some time, expressed the opinion that it was more than likely Manteo was not

among those saved. Peter, her husband, was inclined to moralize upon sudden death in general, with disquieting personal applications as they occurred to him.

In short, these plain Methodist folk used no art to coddle hypersensitive feelings, but rather appeared to take pleasure in discussing the most painful facts in the most public manner. Altogether, it was a relief to Joy as well as to Jessop when an interruption came. The sound of a horse's galloping hoofs was followed by the appearance of Colonel Burr upon Judge Bruin's favorite tall, black saddle-horse, with Mistress Wilful Guion riding pillion behind him.

The errand was surely not a cheerful one, yet the girl's dark eyes were wells of happiness, her red lips curved into smiles in spite of her efforts for gravity. "Oh, Joy," she cried, "do show me just where you stood when you shot your Indian. And did you aim for to kill him?"

"I aimed not at all, to the best of my recollection," returned Joy, a little dryly. "And as for my Indian, methinks he belongeth by right of trove to Master David Batchelor, who slew him without ruth."

"And were you kneeling, Joy? And did he have you by the hair? 'T is so told in the settlement."

" 'T was a very plain matter. I had the rifles to load, and when the man broke in the door and came close to me I fired one of them at him. It appears to me that any fool would have done as much."

"Most fools do not, however, Mistress Valentine," Burr put in, "and some wise people, even, fall considerably short of heroism."

"Sister Loving Longanecker did far more than I," protested Joy, "and yet nobody calls her a heroine."

"Oh, but she is one," supplied Jessop, "whenever Mistress Patience bids her be." There was a quickly suppressed laugh from the more worldly minded at

this sally. The advent of Mistress Wilful was soon followed by the assembling of other members of the Society gathered for the simple funeral ceremonies. Colonel Burr, whose presence, it appeared, was accidental, he having been at some pains to state that he had merely overtaken Mistress Wilful and set her so far upon her journey, soon departed.

As he went forth to mount his horse Jessop accompanied him, and in supplying some added details of last night's adventure spoke with warm admiration of Joyce Valentine's part in it.

"So soon—so soon," laughed Burr, "has innocency and girlish simplicity subdued our gallant Lothario!"

"Nay," returned Jessop, not altogether pleased. "I could ever have appreciated such traits at their worth had I met them."

"My friend," remarked Burr, "an indifference to champagne may signify a natural simplicity of taste, but more oft it results from a too prolonged acquaintance with the best-stocked wine-cellars."

"I take the figure for what 't is worth," retorted Jessop, merrily, "and I reply that I am by no means weary of champagne; and here, in this primitive place, I have stumbled upon a new and entrancing brand. At least 't is new to me, but 't is, I 'll swear, the genuine. Its stimulating quality is its own. Its sparkle—even its froth—is not supplied by artificial gases—'t is native. 'T is a living fount which perpetually tosses up bubbles of kaleidoscopic luster. The bubbles are fugitive, the luster varies, but that which illumines the fountain is a steady-shining soul. Faugh! colonel, how came we coupling anything artificial with this pure, untrammeled creature?"

And, waving the other a smiling farewell, he returned to the room where the circle of benches and chairs was already filled with a primly dressed and prim-mannered gathering.

Father Tobias knelt in their midst and prayed. A hymn was sung, then he arose and spoke feelingly of the dead. He repeated the parable of the talents, and reminded them that while little had been vouchsafed poor Manteo, he had been faithful over that little.

"This, our brother, who was yesterday in our midst and is now gone hence," said the preacher, "came to this country with me fourteen years ago. He had been convicted of sin under my ministration in the Carolinas, and, leaving all for truth,—leaving wife, home, and friends,—he followed me for the truth's sake into the wilderness."

This version of Manteo's wanderings rather startled Jessop, but the congregation, who were in the habit of regarding all things from the spiritual side, saw in it nothing strained. The body of the funeral discourse would sound strange indeed to modern ears. As was the custom of the time, the speaker handled with great plainness the faults of the deceased, drew from them such lessons as he deemed salutary to his hearers, dwelt at length upon the insecurity of life, the possibility of sudden death, and closed with an admonition to watchfulness and diligence in well-doing. Many of the sisters wept—not, certainly, over the loss of Manteo, but apparently at the stern, searching exhortation of their pastor.

The Indians, who had come, in answer to Massawippa's request, to bear away Manteo's body, lingered outside. Their dusky faces, peering through the window to watch the "medicine-man of the palefaces," gave added strangeness to the wild and singular scene. All through the services sounded Massawippa's plaint. The dead Indian lay uncoffined; Massawippa had rejected the offer of a coffin for the body.

Through the open door stole the tender evening light. It lay upon the spotlessly scrubbed floor, touched softly the grim, bronzed features of the dead man, and

lost itself in the veil of Massawippa's heavy hair, as she sat, her forehead on her knees, huddled at the head of the rude bier. It lingered lovingly on the homely furnishings of the room. The cats, wild and tame, lay, for once reconciled, side by side on the hearth. Toka, who had never been known to enter the house before, sat, straight and tall, evidently feeling himself chief mourner, at his master's feet.

David looked across at Joy's rapt countenance. Her eyes were slightly raised as she listened reverently while her father invoked a blessing. Her face was full of a tender sorrow, yet absolutely peaceful. She looked, in her girlish fervor, like a young saint; and Batchelor remembered, with a sudden force of contrast, the Amazonian Mistress Valentine of last night. He was strongly aware that there was more than one Joyce. Which was the real? Or were they all real? And were there not yet other facets to that affluent young nature which had not been developed and presented?

While he debated, the dying light seemed suddenly to concentrate itself upon the brightness of her head and then go out, leaving the room in twilight, so that as the Indians stepped with soundless tread to lift Manteo and bear him away on this first station to the happy hunting-grounds, they seemed like vague figures in a dream.

Father Tobias followed them outside, and Joyce and Jessop were halted on the door-stone by Mistress Longanecker. "Patience says to me, says she," cooed Sister Loving, " 'Mommy, is Master Valentine a-goin' with them Indians over into the Chippewa country? 'Cause if he is,' says she, 'you 've got to go 'long and take care of him.' "

Reassured as to the intentions of Father Tobias, Sister Longanecker again brought up the subject of the

bees. "Ain't ye told 'em yet? Why, Joyce Valentine, go this minute, or ye 'll be lackin' for honey, let alone wax, next fall."

The members of the Society were dispersing. Wilful Guion paused longer than the others for a moment's low-toned speech with Joy. Then, mindful of Sister Loving's urgency, Joyce, with Jessop still following, turned her steps toward where the hives, ranged in orderly rows, stood upon the edge of a tiny buckwheat patch, planted for the maintenance of the bees.

The hives were of the old-time conical shape, made of tawny sedge-grass wrapped into a great cable with cotton twine, and then twisted round and round into a pyramid.

The tall, erect young figure stepped lightly toward the line of hives. Softly, with her open hand, she struck upon each, and, when answered by a hum of inquiry from the inmates, bent down and whispered, "Manteo is dead."

As she spoke to the last hive, the desolate little cortège passed the corner of the field on its way to the canoe, and so onward to the Chickasaw country. The men bore their dead upon an open hurdle; after trudged the old squaw and the gaunt hound, with lowered heads. The bearers, shod in silence, made no appeal to the ear. Their gray forms against the gray evening asked scarcely more of the eye. Shadow of a sound, echo of a picture, if it made little demand upon the physical senses, its spiritual significance called strenuously upon the heart.

"A woman—a dog," said Jessop; "two things which follow a man even unto the end." He turned and looked at his companion, and his heart swelled with the purest tenderness it had ever known. How fair she was, how young, how inexpressibly sweet, how full of hope. And yet, to his thinking, what a gray-shad-

owed, sad existence hers had been! He recognized instinctively in the girl that which would answer promptly to the call of all his world rated as happiness. Would she ever know it? Was he to lead her into the sunshine? He bent toward her with an inarticulate murmur, and caught both her hands in his.

"Mistress Joyce," he began, a little hesitatingly, "I who am but a drone in the hive, think shame to make promises to you, but I have had some speech with David Batchelor. He offers to give me such work as my unskilled hands are able to perform, and to teach me further skill. 'T was for thy sake I made these plans—that I might be near thee. Art pleased, Mistress Joyce? Turn, I pray you, and let me see your face."

Steps sounded on the path behind them, and David Batchelor, passing on his way to the highroad, paused to give them good evening. The little canoe, with the two Indians dipping noiseless paddles at prow and stern, the stark burden between, the crouching squaw at head and the old dog at foot of it, grounded upon the opposite shore. They stood and watched the two men lift the body, the squaw shoulder paddles and canoe, and the three, with the dog following, lose themselves in the virgin forest beyond.

"'T is the one and unsatisfactory riddle of the Sphinx," commented Jessop, as he gazed.

"Out of the wilderness he came," responded David, "and, lo! the wilderness hath swallowed him up."

CHAPTER XI

T "The Meadows" the gin had broken down. It was at that date the primitive Whitney gin, and subject to strange disconcertions and balks. When Jessop arrived, he found Batchelor's motley tribe of employees set to the work of picking staple from seed by hand. In a long, low shed, open on three sides, sat negroes, Indians, men, women, and children—such unassorted humanity as David Batchelor had been able to gather for the work—and with more or less skilful fingers separated the fleece from the germ.

David himself, in a blue cottonade blouse open at the throat, and with a white kerchief knotted beneath its loose collar, was working earnestly at the recalcitrant gin. Little Reason, the boy whom Jessop had seen on the night of the attack upon the cabin, followed him, constant as the dog-star to the moon, and played at mending imaginary gins.

The newcomer introduced to his work and fellow workmen, Batchelor scanned his face keenly for signs of dismay. Jessop, still gaunt from illness, wore his long-skirted coat, knee-breeches, and cocked hat. Indeed, it was not in his power to make a change to a more appropriate costume, since the clothing in which he stood was all he possessed. Batchelor watched, with a twinkle of amusement in his eye, and yet with entire approval, as Jessop, after a proper greeting, seated him-

self between a gigantic negress and a young Indian boy, and, questioning with his usual courteous manner, proceeded in a most amicable fashion to learn from them the nature of his novel task.

Then, in the stress of his work, the master forgot his new workman. Improvement in the agriculture of his section was a passion with David Batchelor. He was a typical son of the soil. The development of the cotton-raising industry lay as close to his heart as the singing of a people's lyrics might lie to the heart of the poet. With the ardor of a poet constructing sonnets, he had attacked the problem of ginning the product.

The original Whitney gin, invented by Eli Whitney, a Massachusetts school-teacher, was in many respects unsatisfactory. Reason's father was a skilled mechanic and inventor whom David had induced to come from Scotland, in hope to have the gin perfected. This man had set sail from home with wife and child, and, the wife dying on the voyage, had come to "The Meadows" with his baby in his arms. Here he found no woman to care for the boy, but, in the master of the house, one as tender as a woman, if not so skilled. And when a fever carried off the father in the following spring, David made the boy his own. Batchelor was still laboring to complete the work the Scotchman had left unfinished.

Now, in entire absorption, he bent an intent face above his work. Hammer in hand, his blue sleeves rolled to the shoulder, showing the big muscles of his strong arms, he gave a thoughtful coaxing tap here, a direct ringing blow there, calling now and then for materials and aid.

This would have been Jessop's opportunity to return the scrutiny to which himself had been subjected, but the unfamiliar task, at which he felt bound in honor

to succeed, quite blotted out everything else from his mind. The Indian lad was uncommunicative, but his negro neighbor took Jessop under her motherly wing. "Iss, honey," she said to him kindly, "oo picky 'im dess lacky dat," and she went off into oily chuckles over Jessop's awkward attempts to follow her instructions.

Most of the workers sat or squatted on the shed floor, and Jessop followed their example until his limbs became so cramped that he went over to the gin to get a cotton-basket to serve for a seat, when Batchelor once more became aware of him.

"How now, Master Jessop, so soon discouraged?" he asked smilingly. "Well, 't is a toil quite unfitted for your hands, which have, I warrant me, skill in other lines of industry to which they might be better addressed."

"You mistake," rejoined Jessop; "I vow that the hand-picking of cotton is the most fascinating amusement ever devised by man, and the company you have gathered to meet me, Master Batchelor, charms me extremely. The dusky dame, my neighbor, is well worth study. I do protest that I have sat next a duchess at dinner and been less entertained."

All this was said with frank gaiety, and Jessop turned with so contented an air to go back to his work, that David was moved to stop him and inquire, "Is there aught else you could do better?"

"Faith, my friend," returned the other, with a show of jesting, and yet with serious meaning in his tones. "I believe there is naught worth doing which I can do well. These fingers of mine—you mentioned that they might have skill at other employment—well, so they have. There are certain fifty-two pasteboards, with spots and marks and royal portraits thereon, which they can manipulate to admiration. They are also expert at letting money slip through them, have been heard to

play with some skill upon the harpsichord, can twang a lute indifferently, and—so my last fair friend assured me—can wring the hearts of ladies. These things, however, do not bring wage; rather they dissipate one's substance. So now, let me back to my labors, and teach them, if I may, an honest occupation."

He strode gaily over to his place in the shed, and shortly David heard him joining with the cheerful voices of the negroes when they began to sing, as is their wont over tasks light or heavy.

At noon David forgot him, and was conscience-stricken, when he came at night to tally over the books of his pickers, to find his new hand with a hectic flush upon his face and a tired droop of his thin figure, which bespoke an aching weariness of every limb and member.

Jessop approached cheerfully, however, and David restrained his impulse to create for him employment more agreeable, with some diversity of movement and better suited to his present physical needs, reflecting that such discipline as this was good for him, and must be met by him sometime if he were ever to grow to the stature of independent manhood.

Jessop paused to chat with his employer a moment before starting homeward. "Did you know Mistress Valentine's mother, Master Batchelor?" he asked. "Is there the answer to the fair riddle? Did our young friend get there her fire and sparkle? It comes not, sure, from Pastor Valentine, who, scarce awake, goes through this life with eyes turned aside from all its verities and fixed upon the unseen—the unattainable."

"The mother died before our good pastor left the Carolinas. I never saw her, but I have known Mistress Joyce since childhood, and I warn you, Master Jessop, she is like to prove more of her father's metal than you suspect."

"Say you so?" laughed the young scoffer. "Mayhap; but I will swear that in her younger, sturdier soul there lie *perdue* longings after the flesh-pots of the world, the which appeal to me as asking temptations fit for their development."

David smiled a bit sadly. "Bethink you, sir," he recommended, "when you would offer these temptations so generously, that any un-Methodistic aspirations of the maid's are like to remain perforce ungratified."

"And even so," returned Jessop, lightly, "unsatisfied ambitions do feed growth. I myself have some few, and I am, beneath their power, burgeoning into an aspiring agriculturist—I may e'en end a good Methody."

Three times, on his way home that evening, Jessop was forced by weakness to sit down for rest. Twice he thought he must have fainted, for there was a period of which he knew nothing between halting and the rousing himself to find that he was lying beside the path, the bushes and trees still whirling about him in most unpleasant fashion.

At first he jeered his weakness. He, a man and a soldier, unable to bear work which seemed light and easy to women and children! Later, when every step was an agony, that quick temper of his flamed up, and he ground his teeth together, declaring furiously that, though he died for it, no more halts should be made. The result of this Spartan resolution was that he reached the cabin in a fainting condition, flung open the door, grasped blindly at the lintel, and fell unconscious across the threshold.

Father Tobias sprang up from his place on the settle, and called Joy from some task in the little kitchen. "Oh, why did he overtax himself so?" she mourned, as they managed between them to lift him to the bed where he had already spent so many weary weeks.

"I warned him to be cautious," lamented Father To-

bias. "Now, perchance he hath quite undone the good work of thy nursing, little daughter."

"I think not of my part in 't," returned Joy, with a nurse's tenderness for her patient. "I would do as much again gladly if he would only be prudent and grow strong. I hold him much to blame for thus fordoing all he hath so painfully gained. Methinks a sensible man might know better."

"Nay, my Joy," remonstrated Father Tobias, a bit humorously. "When you speak of impatience and lack of prudence, methinks 't is what I 've heard called 'Satan reproving sin.' "

The two, experienced in tending upon ailments, as was necessary in those times, worked over Jessop faithfully. After what seemed a long while, he groaned and pushed away Father Tobias's hand, muttering, "My head, my head!"

"He will do now, Joyce, if the wet bandage be kept renewed upon his forehead," comforted Father Tobias. "Do you brew him a pannikin of the bitter tea. I must do your milking for you, and see that the kine are housed. Keep Satan indoors, lest he make havoc when I go to tend upon your little orphan chicks."

"Cover them well, Father Toby; 't is chill weather, and the impatient things would come into this world when 't was full bleak for them," called Joy.

"I shall not forget, daughter Joy," he reassured her, taking the thick homespun coop-covers she handed him.

Just as she had months before, Joyce brewed her bitter tea, poured it into the selfsame blue-and-white willow-pattern bowl, and stepped into Jessop's room with it. Even as he had done on that occasion, Jessop opened upon her eyes bright with fever and quite unrecognizing. Again he mistook her for the fair young mother who had died when he was a boy of seven, whose unforgotten presence always haunted his

dreams in illness or distress. He lay and smiled up into Joy's face, now tender with remorseful concern for him.

She set her bowl upon a little table, and knelt beside his bed. "Will you take your tea now?" she asked, and added, "It will be good for you."

"Why, mother, is it time for my porridge?" he murmured. "I 'm sorry I was naughty." He took the bitter brew very patiently. There must have been childish memories of times when he had been dosed with such decoctions, for once he asked drowsily, "Will it make me well?" and once, "Will it make me good?"

Joyce administered the tea deftly by spoonfuls, changed the wet cloth, and thought her patient quite rational till he turned on his side and, sighing sleepily, promised: "I 'll be good now, mother, and if you 'll kiss me I will sleep."

The interval between impulse and action is sometimes too short for analysis. Joy's heart was full of a tenderness which was almost purely maternal. Without hesitating for thought, she bent forward and laid her cool, fresh lips softly, full on his. Then in the instant of it she knew she should not have done this thing.

She drew back with a burning blush and a startled intake of the breath. Jessop's eyes were looking into hers calmly and with perfect comprehension. Swiftly she rose, gathered up her bowls and basin, and fled to the kitchen.

There she stood on the hearth-stone, her hands knotted together, and could have wept with shame and a sort of panicked astonishment, not only at what she had done, but at the new and terrifying emotions born out of her act.

That other kiss, the one Jessop had lightly, almost jestingly given her, had been crowded quite out of

memory by matters more important. Now, with an access of dismay, she remembered it.

She had been angry then, had thought Jessop forward, had imagined he must think lightly of her; she had been able not only to forgive, but to forget it. Now her virgin soul was shaken, the very wells of her being were troubled, clouded by this strange and terrible thing which she imagined could never before have chanced to any woman. She sought sorrowfully a reason for her own conduct, and for this upheaval in her consciousness which had followed the apparently simple act.

She fancied that she had given the kiss for his mother's sake, just as she might have given it to an ailing child. Jessop's light love-making during his early convalescence was the first to which she had listened. Despite her strict upbringing, she had of course had her dreams and fancies like other girls, but these were so very vague and nebulous, so entirely unconnected with anything in the world of reality about her, that their sudden embodiment was both shocking and alarming.

Finally, the courage which was the dominant note in Joy's nature asserted itself. She would go back and speak to Master Jessop. She would face the issue, and tell him exactly how she came to do this dreadful thing which had come about so naturally and seemed in the doing so little dreadful.

She knew that Jessop liked and respected her; she felt that to hold that liking and respect she must retrace this one false step and blot out the incident once for all. To go was like treading hot plowshares, but she crushed her hands over her tumultuously beating heart and stole back to the doorway. Jessop lay sleeping brokenly, his dark curls tossed abroad upon the white pillow, his lips parted and smiling. On his cheeks, flushed a little with fever, lay the long lashes,

and his hurried, uneven breathing stirred the covers above his breast.

The stress which Joy had put upon herself relaxed. She stood silent, and gazed at him. Suddenly that emotion which had so terrified her laid hold once more upon her heart. She remembered Jessop's eyes as they had looked into hers just after the kiss. They had held a something new, an expression which she had never seen in them before. What was it? Would he ever so look at her again? And in a storm of contradictory feeling it appeared to her that she should die if he ever did so look at her; and that if he did not, she should perish for lack of that something which had thrilled her so.

When Father Tobias came in with his pails from the milking, he found Joy with her head enveloped in a large white cloth, which was a regalia assumed by her during certain domestic ceremonials. Over in one corner of the kitchen she busied herself about some matter apparently very important. When he asked of the patient, she replied: "He seems quite well, and is sleeping so quietly, father, that I thought it best not to disturb him, and so came in here."

When Jessop crept painfully up from this relapse, he insisted upon going once more to "The Meadows." Just beyond "Half-way Cottage" he was overtaken by Colonel Burr, who greeted him, dismounted, and insisted upon his riding. "Well, Major Jessop," the colonel observed, "you lacked a leech for this last rather unnecessary performance, I believe."

"Perchance," retorted Jessop, gaily, "that is the reason I am here to tell the tale."

"That and Mistress Joy's nursing," hinted Burr. "I myself have been enduring worse things than a relapse of swamp fever. I have been in Philadelphia, as you may know, Major Jessop, where the politicians

meet and wrestle and tear each other tooth and nail. I do protest that I am weary of it, and long inexpressibly for the peace of mine own vine and fig-tree here."

"I have renounced my first opinion of this Mississippi country," said Jessop. "'T is a glorious land. The skies here appear to me ever smiling—"

"Even," interposed Burr, slyly, "as the eyes of Mistress Joy."

"Not ever-smiling," objected Jessop; "the eyes of Mistress Joyce Valentine are subject to cloud and storm, and even to a sort of occultation, when a sinful man may not see them at all."

"And there 's their great attraction," added Burr. "Know you the eastern part of this country? Have you sojourned in New York or Philadelphia?"

"A short time," answered Jessop. "I have friends and relatives in both places."

"There 's a vile climate for you," grumbled Burr. "You 're ready, in doublet and hose, to warble spring sonnets under Clorinda's window, and a damned frost comes and freezes your shins for you, while Clorinda's nose is as red as a love-apple."

Jessop laughed. "We hear rumors, Colonel Burr," he remarked, "that you are going very high in the councils of this same desolate land you describe so aptly. Surely you have no mind to desert it because of a little frost and cast in your lot with us here?"

"I have greater disrelish for politics and politicians —the scrambling, get-what-you-can politics of a new republic like ours—than I have for bad weather and frost-bitten toes. This is a land here to uphold a real aristocracy. 'T is suited to be tilled by slave labor. There seems no chance in the East to get above the shopkeeping class. Money is what an aristocracy must have, and there money is gotten through trade. This is a country to nurture barons."

"King-makers and a king?" retorted Jessop, lightly. "With a queen I wot of to share the throne, a man might make shift."

"Which minds me," remarked Burr, "that mine errand with our good friend Batchelor this morning concerns the visit to Mississippi of a certain possible sovereign. Louis Philippe, Duc d'Orléans, is shortly to be here on his way down the river to New Orleans. Judge Bruin and many others of my good friends here are most desirous that the English-speaking residents be also represented in those attentions which the Spanish will pay him."

It struck Jessop as a trifle peculiar that David should be consulted in this matter, but he made no comment, and Burr continued: "Our good friend Batchelor hath a fancy for investigating the silk industry. 'T is said the Salzburgers over in seaboard Georgia—that Georgia which is even now trying to claim most of the Mississippi province—are doing well with silk-raising. There is a man in the duke's suite, Vicomte de Courcy, who is a mine of information on the subject; they say he hath the Lyons district in his pocket. I promised Master David to get him speech with this man, though belike his own merits had done as much for him without me."

They were approaching the large gate which admitted into the pasture surrounding David Batchelor's homestead. "A very fine location Master Batchelor hath chosen the where to pitch his tent," remarked Burr, with a wave of his hand toward the grove of magnolia and beech immediately surrounding the dwelling. Although used for pasture, it had a well-cared-for appearance, and the close-cropped slope dotted with noble trees gave a look of the old country.

A rough fence inclosed perhaps fifty acres, and in the near distance cows were grazing on the yellowed grass,

which occasionally showed a little greenery among its dry stubble.

Giant magnolias reared their dark green branches, hung with streamers of the strange gray moss, toward a clear February sky. Mast from beech-trees, which grow with peculiar luxuriance throughout the whole of Mississippi, covered the ground thickly where a few especially fine specimens stood among the more stately magnolias. A fairly good roadway led to the dwelling-house, built of stout, hewn logs. A recently added portico or gallery, as it was called in the South at that day, was made of plank. Here sat David, at his elbow a small table bearing ink-horn, quills, and a wide-mouthed bottle of sand. Reason, his rosy face puckered with anxiety, was perched in a high chair, working diligently with a quill pen at the forming of his letters. Children began their education early in those days, and David was already teaching his four-year-old with great system and regularity. The boy's love for him, and natural infantile distaste for study, made the hours so spent a mixture of the keenest joy and woe to his baby soul.

David had paused to mend a pen as they came up, and Reasie scrambled down at sight of the two men, ducked under the table, and, crying, "Reasie go now, Dadie. Reason know 'nough now, Dadie!" fled toward the gin-shed.

Burr broached the matter of the ball. Somewhat to Jessop's surprise, David acceded promptly and quietly to Burr's suggestion that he join in the arrangements for the young duke's entertainment. This was, to Jessop at least, a new phase of David Batchelor's character, and in his eyes it added a considerable grace to the man.

"Major Jessop here is going," Burr remarked, when they were about to depart.

"To wait upon table or act as lackey. The present state of my exchequer and wardrobe would fit me well, methinks, for either post," remarked Jessop, with somewhat labored flippancy.

"Why, major, if your luggage hath not yet arrived —you and I might surely wear the same coat, though each is belike in his own esteem the greater man—if your luggage hath not yet arrived, 't would be my pleasure to supply your deficiencies."

"My luggage," quoth Jessop, musingly; "why, surely, I had forgot. Master Batchelor here advanced me certain moneys this three weeks gone in anticipation of the prodigies I should perform, not in the tented field, but in the cotton-field. And I, thrifty soul that I have now become, sent for a half-forgotten box of my old clothing left with a friend. 'T will come up by the next keel-boat. In it there should be suits which I might wear. I thank you, Colonel Burr; I shall be upon your generosity for no more than the invitation, and that I 'll take right gladly."

"Do you bring a lady with you?" Burr inquired abruptly.

"That I know not," Jessop replied, flushing a little and smiling boyishly. "The only damsel who at present fills my eye hath, methinks, scant use for balls and the like—is 't not so, friend David?"

"Yes, if you speak of Mistress Valentine, 't is even so. She hath chosen the calling of a preacher, and the Methodist Society is strict."

Burr gave an inexpressibly comical twist to his features as he exclaimed: "And do the women preach? Lord, Lord! then would I be converted instanter to save trouble. How look your Methodist friends upon your frivolities, Master David?"

"I hold a ball no harm, else should I not attend one; and, not being a member, they have never spoken to

me of such matters. Yet, for Mistress Guion, who you tell me goes with you, Colonel Burr, and for Mistress Valentine as well, 't were better they dissevered themselves from the Society before engaging in that which the Society condemns."

"Will they discipline her, think you? That 's the word, is 't not? I trust they may; 't will free her, mayhap, from a connection she should never have formed."

"They will, you may be sure," returned David, quietly. "Will you, who have brought her into this position, be present to stand by her then? I hope so."

CHAPTER XII

OUIS PHILIPPE, born at the Palais Royal in Paris in 1773, was at this time a handsome young man of just twenty-five. The execution of his father during the Reign of Terror gave him the title of Duc d'Orléans. He was a brilliant and dashing soldier, who had seen service and proved his valor on more than one bloody field. Fleeing from the turbulence in his own country, he passed through the new republic to join his mother, who had found an asylum in Spain. With his two brothers and a suite of attendants proper to his princely rank, his progress through the French-Spanish-American colonies, still loyal to Bourbon traditions, was one long triumph.

There were those among the English-speaking residents of Natchez no whit behind their Spanish neighbors in the homage and distinguished courtesies with which they designed to honor the royal wanderer. General Wilkinson, commander-in-chief of the United States army, wrote Captain Guion, in charge of the Natchez district, exhorting him to show hospitality and respect to the young duke and his suite. In the course of his communication he used these prophetic words: "When you receive this letter"—it was delivered in person by the Marquis de Mountjoye, an important member of the duke's party—"you will probably see the future King of France."

For months preparations had been making for the proper reception of the royal party at Natchez. The treaty between the United States government and His Most Catholic Majesty of Spain was signed in '95. The year of grace '98 saw a curious state of affairs in the province ceded by this treaty. Spanish law was still in force, since law there must be for the protection of life and property. Spanish troops garrisoned most of the forts, yet the Spaniards and the people at large were aware that these laws were obeyed only, as one may say, by courtesy, and that the troops had no authority. Early in '98 the government at Philadelphia having found that a display of military power, and not an exercise of diplomacy, was necessary to force the Spaniard to a recognition of the pact, United States troops began coming into the southwest territories to displace the Spanish.

At the time of the young duke's visit the troops of both governments were in Natchez and in Fort Nogales. The Spaniards were preparing to evacuate, the United States to occupy this entire territory. It was an extremely critical situation, big with possibilities of the most tragic sort. Yet, owing to the courtesy and the honorable behavior of both commanders, the soldiery of the two nations had been able to lie encamped close together without collision.

When the royal party passed Fort Nogales and Walnut Hills, where Vicksburg now stands, Governor Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, with an extensive suite of his own, joined the duke and accompanied him to Natchez.

The little town in the wilderness was filled with brave soldiery, with brilliantly dressed, distinguished visitors, and citizens gay in holiday attire. The town itself, "Natchez under the Hill," was somewhat primitive, but near and upon the bluffs were many luxurious

homes, and there was more wealth and culture than would have been deemed possible in a territory so recently settled. The inns of the day were of course quite insufficient for such superior company, but the planters in the surrounding district and the few families of wealth who had already established residences within the town itself, were more than willing to supply the deficiency.

Louis Philippe, the deposed Spanish governor, the Spaniards accompanying him, and a few American gentlemen who had been added to the train in its progress through this country, were received with great enthusiasm.

The soldiery, American and Spanish, had been for weeks drilling, burnishing arms and accoutrements, and putting all in such order that something like a military display or review might greet this young scion of the Bourbons, who was himself an honorable and intrepid soldier.

Two large keel-boats brought the visitors to Natchez. That containing the duke's party was decorated with the Bourbon lilies and the colors of Spain. These adornments, which had been arranged at Fort Nogales, added much to the picturesqueness of the modest transport.

The duke's party greeted the Spanish flag, which was still flying over Fort Rosalie, with cheers and much demonstration of enthusiasm, but the governor's suite was discreetly silent. Lined up on either side of the way which led from the landing to the main street, facing each other, but not for battle, were the Spanish and the United States troops. The bands of both joined in the national airs of France.

The carriages of the aristocracy, decorated with scarfs, bunches of early spring flowers, and silken flags, waited at one end of the main street to take the

distinguished guests on a tour of inspection. Over the vilest roads that can be imagined, they crawled to Fort Rosalie and other points of local and historical interest.

One feature of his reception particularly pleased and interested the duke. A band of friendly Chickasaws had been induced to give, in the open square, a war-dance, a sun-dance, and other of their peculiar ceremonies.

Seats were arranged for the visitors under an awning. Many of the beautiful and cultured women of the section, both Spanish and American, were in attendance. The Indians were in full regalia; war-bonnets of quivering quills and brilliantly dyed feathers swayed to their rhythmic movements as they danced.

Young beauties, clad in the latest modes from Paris, or as near it as the time and distance would permit, gently nurtured, high-bred, looked on at the savage spectacle. There were times and places when the sight of one of these painted braves would have meant to both men and women a terror worse than death. Now they laughed and jested and admired the muscular endurance of the sinewy dancers, who, with impassive features, sprang and leaped and writhed to the wailing and thudding of their barbaric music.

Slaves carrying huge trays of fruit and silver salvers of rare wines and fine liqueurs passed among the guests. The young beauties were not less fair, less witty, nor less well clad than those of Madrid or Versailles. And there was a subtle exhilaration like new wine in the very air of this crude country, a piquant contrast between these elegant and gracious people and the savage dancers—also citizens of the land—which spurred the fancy and captivated the senses.

The Indian ceremonials over, the newcomers were driven to the various residences of those who were

to entertain them, and the little town settled to the breathless quiet of mighty preparation for the night's ball, which was to be the grand affair of the festivities.

During these goings on, our friends of the Methodist Society kept within doors, as though a plague were abroad in the land. Indeed, they felt that such was the case. In some households the children were strictly forbidden to look from window or door if a portion of the pageant passed near the cabin.

How lax, then, was Master Tobias, how weak and more than lax Mistress Joyce Valentine! For this reprehensible young woman, assisted—in the capacity, one may say, of mirror—at the very last and finishing touches given to Master Jessop's costuming for the great event. Yea, she not only assisted at them, but was moved thereby to envy and admiration.

At the bottom of Jessop's box of clothing, which arrived the week before, lay a forgotten suit of white satin. He had considered it quite too fine for wear since he had been in the Americas. It had first seen the light in a king's palace, and Jessop smiled whimsically as he lifted and looked at it.

There was nothing else in the box—absolutely nothing—suitable for wear at a ball, and this costume was, to his thinking, as unsuitably fine as his ragged working-dress was unsuitably coarse.

"Yet," he said, as he lifted the long silken hose and the white morocco shoes, from which the diamond buckles had been removed in time of need, "beggars cannot be choosers. I cannot greet the Duc d'Orléans in a scarlet riding-coat nor in a *robe de chambre*. I am e'en reduced to outshining everybody, because I have naught less glorious."

He sought Mistress Joyce, in her freshly scrubbed kitchen, and begged of her a pannikin of hot water,

that he might shave himself. He was humming "The Brown Girl," and he dwelt rather conspicuously on the lines:

> "They sat her up at the head of the table,
> She was the flower of all—she was the flower of all."

His feet unconsciously accommodated themselves to the measure as he went, with a light, balancing step, about his preparations.

" 'She was the flower of all—she was the flower of all.' That 's what I 'll be, Mistress Joyce," he added, laughing. The youthful gaiety, the joy of life, ran strong in Jessop's veins once more.

When he was shaved, dressed, and combed there came the problem of his hair. The abundant dark curls would have been a scandal, almost an insult, displayed at an evening company of that date, and this was a ball at which royalty appeared.

He looked in dismay at his powder-box, the silver clasps and white satin ribbon for winding the club and keeping the queue in place. Finally, he went out to where Father Tobias was cleaning a rifle, holding a tallow candle in its old silver candlestick first to one side and then to the other to observe the progress of his work.

"It puts me to the blush to ask it of you," Jessop hesitated, "and yet in the nature of things, Master Valentine, I cannot do my own hair." Father Tobias looked up bewildered. "The one barber in yonder town," went on Jessop, "hath by this time, I doubt not, been mobbed and dismembered. And in any case, he is six miles away, over the worst road, I do think me, that ever lay outside man's door.

"Certainly," assented Father Tobias, with kindly alacrity, "you want me to comb your hair."

"Why, no," deprecated Jessop, "'t is not quite so

bad as that. I have myself combed it quite thoroughly. Now, if you will but step here to my room one moment, tie a ribbon as I 'll show you, and dust a bit of powder on, 't will answer."

But, however easy in the telling, Father Tobias found it no simple task. He tied his amiable, blundering fingers into the knots of ribbon, and untangled them with great difficulty. The powder he was afraid to touch, dreading that by a too copious shower of it he would spoil all.

After fumbling conscientiously for fifteen minutes, he owned himself quite beaten. "I begin to believe," he hesitated gently, rubbing his temple with a dubious forefinger and eying the strange wreck he had made of Jessop's head, "that I was not born for a hair-dresser."

"But for greater and better things," supplied Jessop, whose bubbling gaiety and satisfaction nothing could damp.

"Why, yes, perchance; for a preacher of the Word, I and my friends who love me think. And as these trappings of the world are forbidden us by the discipline of our Society, I am limited to the plentiful powder of age upon mine own locks, and have no practised hand wherewith to powder the locks of another. Come to the room without, Master Jessop, and let us call daughter Joy to help me. Betwixt us, we can surely accomplish the work."

The two men gathered up awkwardly the necessary paraphernalia and went into the living-room.

Something very like dismay swept over Joyce as she got her first sight of Jessop's shining figure. She covered her feeling by an instant show of concern for his coat. "You should not dress his hair above that silken collar," she objected sharply. "'T will soil it, mayhap. Doth not the hair-dresser always pin a towel

about your shoulders, Master Jessop, when he dresses your hair?"

Not twice in his life had Jessop been under the hands of a public barber. His own valets, first and second, were both trained hair-dressers. He remembered humorously that there had been some sort of silken affair provided to spread above the *robe de chambre* while his dark locks were curled or powdered or tied up.

Now he said seriously: "Why, yes, I think a towel is the proper thing. I thank you, Mistress Joyce, for the suggestion. 'T is so long since I have been dressed —I have been merely clothed of late—that I find I have forgotten how dressing is done."

Joyce brought a large, snowy, coarse cloth of her own weaving. Jessop was not a tall man,—he was scarce above Joy's own height,—yet the pinning of this cloth about his neck was attended with some difficulty. Her face, directly opposite and slightly lower than his own, was raised to his, while her fingers, made suddenly awkward, sought vainly to knot the cloth in place. Her eyes, down-dropped, refused persistently to meet his own, which permitted Jessop to note the unusual length and beauty of her lashes.

He was half minded to ask something which should make her lift these heavy lashes and favor him with one of those swift, half-revealing glances for which he had come of late to watch. But he observed the tremulousness of her lips and the trouble in her face, and, with a consideration which was a new thing in Jessop, he not only forbore speech, but turned aside his gaze and addressed himself to Father Tobias.

"She 's bibbing me, Master Valentine, you observe. Faith, it minds me of nursery days. A touch more of this and I shall say, 'Mama, I 'll be good.' "

"I pray you, sit down," cut in Joy's voice querulously.

"I cannot reach you here, as you might well know with a little forethought." And Jessop turned in surprise, to see that she had blushed burningly. He could have sworn, too, that there were tears beneath those mysterious lashes.

Something in her face, or perhaps something in his own consciousness,—that subconsciousness of ours which is said to store away and retain all our acts, sleeping or waking, knowing or unknowing,—brought to his mind the memory of that kiss which Joyce had given him, and which had remained an unmentioned, unacknowledged secret between them. He felt a great rush of tenderness toward the brave young creature who faced all the issues of her life with such dauntless courage, and who was yet a very woman.

As he stood there, exquisite in his silk attire, his powder and lace, Jessop felt an unaccustomed film in his eyes at which he wondered half cynically. When he was seated as she had commanded, Joy brought him her own quaint little silver mirror, a keepsake which had come to her with some other trinkets from the young mother whom she had never seen.

"Now, Master Jessop, you may look in that and tell me what to do, for I have small skill in dressing the heads of gentlemen."

"Whatever you may do to their hearts, Mistress Joy," supplied Jessop, gaily—"whatever you may do to their hearts. Now, may I trouble you? Will you gather it all in one hand, somewhat as an Indian brave about to scalp me—though, as I am already your victim, I hope you will spare me that."

Her slender, toil-roughened fingers slipped through the fine mesh of his curls. Dark strands twisted silkily about them. The touch sent a thrill to Joy's heart, unwelcome because it reminded her of that memorable day when she had forgotten herself, and, as it seemed

to her now, had kissed the owner of those curls boldly, wantonly, sinfully.

"Now, Mistress Joy, divide it in three parts, and lay them loosely over one another in a braid—so. Draw them out about the ears, will you? That 's called the pigeon wings—I 'm a dove about to take flight, you see. Next, plait tighter with your three strands. Draw them as snugly as you can now; that 's the club, and we must have it a good, stout one, or, what with dancing and bowing and mincing, I shall have my locks flying about in the most ungenteel fashion."

Joyce followed each direction with intelligent docility. Her lips were pressed tight together, and her eyes were full of tears. She was ashamed of the feeling, yet it broke the heart in her bosom to look down upon her own coarse garb against Jessop's sumptuous satin. The thought that she stood playing valet, making him fine that he might go out to a world of pleasure which she could not share—which she could never share —was exceeding bitter.

She had carefully kept Jessop's head between her and the mirror. Now, with a sudden shifting of it, he caught a full view of the woeful countenance.

He sprang up in alarm, quite undoing all Joy's patient work. "Mistress Joyce!" he cried, "what is it? What have I done? Did I speak harshly to you? I 'm such a thoughtless brute," and, unmindful of Father Tobias, he caught her hands and attempted to gaze into her eyes.

"Why, 't is naught," returned Joy, pulling away her hands. "Now, look you; you 've undone all my work, and I was near finishing. Why should you ask what ails me?"

Silenced, but not satisfied, Jessop sat meekly down. He was resolved, however, not to offend again, and to

"A LITTLE TO THE LEFT, PRAY, MISTRESS JOY."

this end with every suggestion he made he kept a wary eye upon Joy's face in the mirror.

That young woman, however, was equally resolute not to have her tell-tale features studied.

"A little to the left, pray, Mistress Joy," Jessop would counsel, moving his mirror slightly to the right, and be rewarded with a flying glimpse of the tip of Joy's ear and the twist of her shining hair as she dodged skilfully behind her own handiwork.

At last the queue was braided, the pigeon wings worked up, the club tightly wrapped with its white-satin ribbon, the silver clasps—something quite new to this provincial community—fastened in place, and Joy was ready to dust the powder on. To do this she would have to face him, and Jessop, weary of the game of bo-peep, heaved a sigh of relief. He would now be able to study her face and know if he had really wounded her, either by his attitude or speech.

But no woman of the *grand monde* could have met the situation with more tact than this young backwoods woman, whose aspiration it was to become a Methodist preacher. "There," she said in a tone of satisfaction, "what with your instruction and my disposition to observe worldly frivolities of this sort, I should say we have done famously, Master Jessop. Now, close your eyes and we 'll get the powder on. Oh, close them tight; 't is no use blinking like that—they would be dusted full."

Jessop obeyed, half sulkily. He was chagrined at being met and so completely worsted on his own ground.

This minor triumph somewhat lightened Joy's dragging heart, but not for long. As she flecked the powder from an exposed portion of his sleeve and unpinned the cloth, the bleak pathos of her position came home to her.

Instinctively she turned to Father Tobias. "Here, Father Toby," she said, "when they turn me out of the Society and will have none of me for a preacher, shall I not make my living bravely as a hair-dresser?"

Jessop stood up full dressed. He had put on, with this attire, something else. Unconsciously he had assumed the manner of his former world, and, to some extent, there came with it that world's point of view and spiritual outlook. As Father Tobias and Joy turned to inspect him, he raised his beruffled hand, laid it against his heart, and, laughing, gave them the grand salute.

Jessop was a graceful fellow. Born to wealth and power, their trappings sat well upon him. He might have dazzled a more experienced girl. Standing there in his shimmering white satin that took the light like pearl, with the powdered curls above his forehead bringing out all the fervid beauty of his dark eyes, to Joy he looked like a being from another sphere. She felt poignantly that he was at least of a world which was not hers.

Father Tobias took the antique candlestick and, raising it high, walked about Jessop, viewing him from all sides. "Why, now," he said approvingly, "'t is well done, my Joy. Back in my time, when I was one of the world's people, we all wore wigs."

"As some do now," supplemented Jessop. "But I, who have no wig and no money wherewith to purchase a wig, must content myself with meeting the fashion in powdered hair."

Joy looked at the two men, one young, handsome, gay in his magnificent evening dress, the other a little bent, and in the old black coat whose narrow skirts were almost gown-like, his thin, silvery hair falling lightly on his shoulders and making a sort of aureole to frame the gentle, unworldly old face.

They imaged to her, although she scarcely realized it at that moment, the two possibilities in her nature. Father Tobias stood for her childhood and youth, her old ideals and hopes. He represented to her the Joyce Valentine whose highest aspiration it was to become a preacher of the Word.

Jessop typified another woman, whose first stirrings within her she had regarded as deadly sin. She had been learning of late that there was a potential Joyce Valentine who loved, beyond all else, beauty and luxury and gaiety and life and form and color—a woman of restless and passionate desires, one who would bring to bear upon what Joyce now considered sinful and selfish pleasures the same courage and address that the Puritan Joyce Valentine had ever brought to bear upon the doing of her duty.

Father Tobias reminded them that it was time Master Batchelor would be passing with the coach. Jessop brought out the three-cornered white hat which, robbed as it was of its diamond star, was much finer than he desired it to be, and, the coach having driven up, the old man cautioned Jessop lest he soil his white shoes or injure his beautiful costume. His placid old face expressed the most innocent and unmeasured delight in Jessop's magnificence. He lighted him quite to the coach door, shading the candle with his withered hands, lest some untoward accident happen to the snowy splendor he so much admired.

CHAPTER XIII

ATHER TOBIAS appreciated to the full that this glimpse of a life she could not hope to enter must be surely trying to a young and ardent creature like his daughter. "My Joy," he said, pausing beside her chair on his way to the little attic chamber, "you 'd never think it, dearest, but your old gray-headed father has been through it all."

"Through what?" asked Joyce, in a muffled voice, her lips against the palm of the hand she had drawn about her neck.

"Oh, the longing and the trouble and the heavy cross, dear heart, when the things of this world look so beautiful and the Voice is not always strong enough to be heard."

"The Voice?" repeated Joy. "I don't know that I ever did hear it, Father Toby. Mayhap I never was called; what think you? Did it seem to you a true call?"

" 'Many shall be called and few chosen,' " quoted Father Tobias, softly. "Yea, I did think, my daughter, that thou wert one of God's own. Shall we take it to the Lord in prayer?"

The two knelt down beside that humble hearth-stone, which was surely in purity and love an acceptable altar, and Father Tobias prayed, not that Joy should be led in one way or the other, but that she should be led

aright. His gentle, humble petition acknowledged the fallibility of human judgment, the weakness of the human heart, and left room for other beliefs than his own to be proven best.

This touch of warm human sympathy somewhat comforted Joy's sore heart. But when he was gone, and she sat alone waiting for Jessop, her spirit sank very low indeed. Since Manteo's death, Joyce had been sleeping above stairs, but this night she had for a while persuaded herself that it was necessary some one should await Jessop's coming, to see the house safely closed after him. Then misery rent away the disguise, and she acknowledged that she was sitting there waiting for another glimpse of him, hungry to hear him talk of that gay world with which he had mingled, eager to know if he would, after it, still care to look into her eyes as he had done.

For a long time she fought against the desire to rise and take from the mantel shelf, where she had placed it, the quaint little mirror which Jessop had held. Finally, she reached it down, and looked at herself sadly and long. She saw in it a face of irregular beauty, full of charm—a charm she did not recognize. She sighed impatiently, and wondered how white satin would become her, and then she fell to dreaming. She was a child again, listening to the sweet, droning voice of an old woman telling her fairy tales.

Back in the early days, when Father Tobias was struggling with the problem of what might be best for an eager, restless girl of twelve, there was an old Irish lady, a woman of birth and title, who had followed her two sons into the wilderness, and who loved to have Joyce about her chair or the companion of her solitary dinner when these same sons were absent. Pastor Valentine was much criticized for permitting the intimacy, since Lady Connor was a Catholic. But,

gentle as was Father Tobias, he always managed his own affairs in his own way, and during the winter which the Connors spent in Mississippi, Joy was instructed in all the fairy lore which had nurtured the old Irishwoman's own youth.

Now, as she sat, with the little mirror in her lap, musing of Jessop, these fairy tales echoed through her mind and mingled themselves with her thoughts of him. She brooded upon the "Knight in Snow-white Armor, the very Flower of Men." She thought that just as Jessop looked in his satin and laces, so must have looked the fairy prince who waked the Sleeping Beauty. Before her the picture floated dreamily of the prince kneeling beside the sleeping princess as he bent to kiss her. That kiss had wakened not only the princess, but her whole castle to life. Then she remembered with a burning blush the time when, kneeling, she had given, not received, such a kiss, and that it had wakened many things in her woman's soul to which she had been a stranger. Burying her face in her hands, she for the first time seriously entertained the thought that not only was she unfit to preach the Word, but that the strongest part of her belonged to the world.

And here, in spite of all her honest efforts, rebellious thoughts would follow Jessop. She saw him moving, a lustrous figure in a dream, through gorgeous rooms, courtly, elegant, far off, as he had seemed to her tonight.

Back of all lay the consciousness that there was shame in thus giving rein to her idle and sinful fancy. Her father's face, mild and protecting as it had beamed down on her after his prayer, half formed, wavered, and then faded to give place to another.

She wondered dully why David Batchelor should intrude upon her musings. She decided finally that it

must be because he was not a member of the Society, but one who voluntarily and without constraint of any sort elected to tread the path which she was beginning to find too bleak and difficult for her feet.

Well, why should he not? If she were free, even as he was, to take or leave as she list, she felt that the leaving would be less hard, the taking less repugnant. David had gone to the ball. If she might only go to such a place once, if she might see the worldly life as it was, she would then be willing to give it up for all time. But her own reason showed her that this was idle and sophistical. As she phrased it to herself, it was "a lure of the evil one to lead her soul astray."

Wearied with doubts and questionings to which she found no answer, she at last fell asleep on the hard old settle, her head pillowed on her arm, to doze and dream uneasily till Jessop's hand upon the latch wakened her.

He was flushed, smiling, alert. She had never seen him so gay, so poised, so completely a man of the world.

And suddenly the room was smaller, more homely, meaner, humbler in its appointments, as though he had contracted it by its greatness, and with his brilliance dimmed the light of its one pitiful candle.

"You should not have waited up for me, Mistress Valentine. Your father gave me the secret of the latch, so that I might enter, disturbing none."

She had attempted to cajole her own judgment. But now, when inquired of by Jessop, she replied with characteristic candor: "Nay, Master Jessop, I am so worldly minded that I could not rest till you had told me of the ball, and who was there, and how the young duke appeared. I never in my life saw aught like it. I fear I think too much upon such things. But perchance if 't were once freely told me 't would quiet what I sometimes think is a wicked craving."

All this was said so naïvely, yet so sweetly, that Jessop was charmed. He looked with a swift access of admiration at the tall, slight figure and the serious, pale face. If this girl, he thought, could be transformed into one of the fine ladies with whom he had been dancing, half her charm would be lost. Her quaint simplicity and directness moved him strongly. He remembered, with something like surprise, that he had once thought her unfit for an exalted station in life. So fair, so pure, so utterly honest and courageous a young creature! Why, she was a very queen among women, and fit for any position, even a royal one. He glowed with admiration for her as they seated themselves and he began to speak.

"In the first place, Mistress Joy, to begin with your own friends, I went, as you know, with Master David Batchelor. He was attired—or did you see him, perchance?—in a sober suit of black satin which was, like himself, the proper thing, and good enough and not too good, so that you marveled somewhat, as you often do of Master Batchelor, that he should have hit it so exactly. Colonel Burr—who, by the way, asked of you, and expressed his sorrow that you were not present—was resplendent in pearl satin, and had with him a pearl indeed in Mistress Wilful Guion, who quite out-flamed him, since she was attired, like a poppy, all in scarlet."

"In scarlet—and at a ball—Wilful?"

"Why not?" questioned Jessop.

"Know you not that she is a probationer of our Society? Such things are not permitted to us. 'T is but six months since she was taken into the Society upon probation. Her mother is a Papist, but her father was a member of the Society back in the Carolinas, and on his death-bed Wilful promised him to join us. And now they will say she hath fallen from

grace, and they will discipline her. Oh, poor Wilful! I am sorry for her, though I am in my heart, belike, no better." She bowed her head in proud humility.

As he sat in the ball clothes, powdered, curled, alight, his fine dark eyes, at Joy's last humble words, fixed upon her tired, wistful face an ardent look. "Poor little sinner"—Joy's lithe, young form rose almost as high as Jessop's, but she was in no mood to object to the manner of his speech, which held so sweet caressing—"and do you really deem you are a wicked reprobate because, forsooth, you feel the pulse of youth bound free within you? Hast thou ever done harm to mortal creature—unless to one poor heart which thou first warmed, and then blew cold upon, and now perchance hast lit a fire within that may consume it?"

His smooth, pleasant voice dropped low, and he brought his face perilously close to that beside him. "Wilt seek to put it out, or only starve the flame for want of proper feeding?" Then, whispering, "I have grown hard and bitter and sinful in misfortune, but I was once used to joy, and could yet learn to live with it again."

Every nerve in the girl's body was tense, strung to a pitch which was almost irresponsibility, but, with a brave effort which Jessop recognized and in his heart applauded, she drew herself together and said: "Methought I was to hear about the ball? Wilful wore red, you say; she often did before she joined with us. It much becomes her; but what of the prince—the duke —was he in white?" and then flushed painfully.

With a light laugh, Jessop bent one knee and, looking straight up into the delicate, yet strong face, wan in the dimness of the dull old room, he said: "One there was in white who would fain be prince to Princess Joy. May he swear fealty to her here, and claim a prince's right?"

Her heart was in a tumult. She labored to fetch her breath. But almost roughly she repulsed him. "'T is to be hoped your other clothes, which were so sadly needed, will be better served than these. Ashes are ill powder for your satins. Look to the hearth there; you will foul yourself. Besides, Master Jessop, this is the cabin of a Methodist preacher, and not a fine lady's drawing-room. The prince—what, then, was his attire?"

Abashed, but nowise angered, Jessop rose quietly to his feet. For a moment his sword-knot claimed close attention. Then he strolled, humming a bit of dance music beneath his breath, toward the window; and, coming back to begin life all over again—as Jessop ever did after any check or hindrance—seated himself by the table and resumed smilingly:

"The prince's attire? Well, Mistress Joy, the prince wore blue, not white; the blue that is the sky-tint, much jeweled, and bedecked with priceless lace, and on his breast were many orders—"

"Orders?" Joyce echoed, puzzled.

"Orders are ribbons, or badges, bestowed in recognition of high rank, or some special deed of chivalry or courage. 'T is not only princes may wear these. Thyself, my queen, have already decorated me with the order of the Bleeding Heart." He threw her one of those daring, languishing glances befitting the exaggerated speech.

"Master Jessop," remonstrated Joyce, soberly, "I pray you do not use this tone toward me. Bethink you I am a poor, humble girl; I have no skill wherewith to parry such speeches, or pay them back in kind. If I were foolish, I might even think you meant them."

She looked so sweet and serious, so noble, and withal so beautiful, that Jessop's blood was fired. He sprang up, and, going to her, dropped again beside her

on his knee. All that was manly, all that was best in him was uppermost. "I beg you to believe," he cried, looking straight into her eyes, "that I do mean them every word, and not only such doltish speeches as those which are current among the belles and beaux of Christendom, but very much more which you deserve and which I cannot express to my kind little nurse and the dear saint who is careful over the saving of my renegade soul."

He did not touch her, nor offer her the light gallantries of the time. A better note had been struck. Seating himself beside her on the settle, he said gaily: "'T will soon be day, my monitress and teacher—my soul's keeper. As you have prayed for me these many times, I doubt not, why, let me make a fair return by telling you how the sinful world wags at a ball.

"There was fair Mistress Margaret Bruin, of Bayou Pierre, in slippers all too tight for her. Brave child! She danced and never flinched at all. Were her feet as dainty as some I wot of, she 'd have no need to cramp them so," and he glanced down at Joy's rough, clumsy little shoe, which could not hide the noble arching of her slender foot. "There were two ladies with the governor—two Spanish ladies—whom I met in London five years gone; they brought me news of that world in which I used to live before I died and came here."

"Before you died and came here?" echoed Joyce, wonderingly.

"Yea, certes," returned Jessop, lightly; "are you not an angel?—and is not this therefore heaven?—and must not a sinful man die before he go to heaven?"

"Were the gentlemen all dressed as you were?" asked Joyce, rather hastily. "I mean in silks and satins—and white. Were there any there so beautiful as that?"

Again Jessop was touched almost to tears. "Why, no, my little friend," he answered. "Your poor penitent quite out-dazzled all of them so far as clothing went, and that 's because he had naught else. The duke wore jewels, and my jewels, Mistress Joy, have passed beneath the sign of the three golden apples, and are thereby in occultation till prosperity's sunshine bring me a better day."

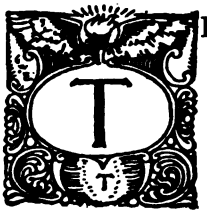
He turned and saw the face beside him wet with tears. "Dear Mistress Joy," he said, in some awe of her unusual emotion, "is 't possible those tears are shed for me? If that is so, I ask no other jewels."

They rose by common consent, hand in hand. Something, Joy felt, had come to her with that night and its revelations which left her other than she had been, which marked a milestone on her way from girlhood to womanhood. She had been angry at Jessop, indignant with him, half afraid of him, and through it all admired and loved him more than she desired to do. Now, spent with resistance and doubtings and emotion, she only felt that he was very dear, and that it was sweet to her to be loved by him. All other questions were pushed aside for future answering.

She took her hands from his, raised them, and laid them lightly on his shoulders. The new day, coming through the little low window, smote upon her face. There was something kindred between Joyce Valentine and the daybreak. Her eyes were large and serious. She fixed them upon his, and whispered very softly, "God bless you," and then, after a brief pause, "God keep you always."

And it is to be recorded of Jessop that so impressed was he, and so touched, by this strange termination of a frivolous conversation about a ball, that he forbore to proffer any caress or to presume in the least upon her loving-kindness.

CHAPTER XIV



HE Valentine cabin lay peaceful and quiet in the evening sunlight. Satan dozed on the hearth beside Faithful. Father Tobias, book in hand, paced the length of the living-room, as was his wont when in any peculiar stress of thought or emotion.

Joy was busied with bread-making. The conflict of emotions through which she had come since Father Tobias called her in to help with Jessop's hair had left a spent and wearied look upon her young face. The corners of her red lips drooped a bit; her step was inelastic and dragging as she went from the hearth to the table with bowl or tray. Jessop was gone again to "The Meadows," and life had settled down once more to its workaday round.

Joy had begun upon Jessop's song at her work:

> "The brown girl she hath houses and lands,
> Fair Ellen she hath none,"

murmured the fresh, young voice over and over.

There were steps outside, and Nicholas Swazey, Abner Chew, Heritage Hamtranck, and Demler Dunn, accompanied by Sister Loving Longanecker, who was in turn followed by the inevitable Patience, filed solemnly in. The callers were suitably greeted and given chairs, where they sat in silence so persistent that the

meeting appeared to be a Quaker rather than a Methodist one.

But that "loquacious vessel," Sister Longanecker, could not long remain poised without spilling over in conversation. "Patience has been a-telling me, Pastor Valentine, for a long time that something ought to be done about one of our members," she began.

"The one of whom you spoke to me?" questioned Father Tobias. "I should be very sorry to have that matter once more raised in the Society."

"We are all mighty sorry, Master Valentine," said Demler Dunn's grave, low voice, "yet none of us can see any way but that young person will have to be dealt with."

Abner Chew, a very tall, thin man, with rugged, serious face and gray hair, began solemnly, as a man enunciating important matter, to relate the delinquencies of the young girl whose case was under consideration. "It is Mistress Wilful Guion of whom we speak," he announced. "I am informed that she hath been seen with ribbons of a blue or scarlet color—was it blue or scarlet, Sister Longanecker?—tying up her locks."

"Aye," volleyed the sister thus bidden forth from silence, "and a tucker frilled till 't was scarce to be known as a tucker at all! 'T was modish frivolity—a scandal, and a shame—on the neck of a young female who professes to belong to the Methodist Society—though she be but a probationer, and—"

Father Tobias turned impatiently to Master Dunn. There was an infrequent frown on his brow. "These be small matters, it appears to me, to bring against a brother or a sister in the Society. Have ye aught more serious to present?" he interrupted sharply.

"Why, surely, Master Valentine," broke in Nicholas Swazey, "you are not unaware that this young woman hath attended a ball? Yea, in the company of a god-

less man called Burr. I myself have no desire to know of these matters. If we have put the world away from us, I hold that curiosity as to its doings is sinful; but I have a son, as you know, who is a young man, and the young are not always to be controlled in their desires."

Back at the kitchen table, her hands deep in dough, Joyce winced at these words.

"Well, Master Swazey, and what then?" urged the preacher. "Are we to discipline your son also?"

"Nay, I meant not that," returned Nicholas, naïvely; "yet I will relate his fault, and if it seemeth good to the class I will not, because he is my son, seek to shield him from the discipline."

Master Valentine strode to the window and stood looking out, his hands knotted behind his back, his troubled eyes upon the roadway.

Such scenes as this always tried his soul. For some reason which he could not explain to himself, he longed for the sight of David Batchelor.

As David was not a member of any of the classes, it would be improper for him to be present, and Father Tobias sighed restively and turned back to face those in the room behind him. They were good people, they were his own people, yet the harshness of their judgment, the narrowness of their vision in this matter, made him crave speech with one whose breadth and strong humanity were more nearly akin to the pastor's own soul.

Sister Longanecker could bear repression no longer. "She hath danced! Wilful Guion hath danced! She was seen moving her feet, and her hands, and head and body too, belike, to the lewd music of the fiddle. Nicholas Swazey's own son Samuel spied through the window and saw her, and—" with a swift side glance at Patience—" 't was a wicked, wicked thing for him

to do, and one for which he should be disciplined, I warrant, as his own father doth not deny."

"Well, well, well, now let us have the conclusion of the whole matter," interposed Father Tobias. "This child, who is particularly dear to my soul because she came to us out of the fold of the Catholics, and of her own free will, not six months gone, hath been seen to tie her hair with a bright ribbon and she hath gone to a dance."

"With a most godless man," supplied Sister Longanecker, promptly. "Patience says to me early this morning, 'Mommy,' says she, 'if that wicked man was to come about you or me they 'd have us up before the class, and I don't see what better Wilful Guion is just because she hath been a Catholic.' "

"My friends," said the pastor, who appeared to have listened not at all to these edifying remarks, "I will attend to this matter. I should prefer that the poor child seek me, but the occurrence of the ball cannot be passed over, and I must e'en go to her with fatherly counsel."

"Not to her house," interposed Sister Longanecker, in a horrified tone. "The mother is a Papist, and a widow at that." Why a widow, Papist or otherwise, should be a dangerous creature for Master Valentine to encounter, Sister Loving did not pause to explain.

Joy had withdrawn her hands from the dough and washed them. Now she appeared in the doorway, looking tall and pale and tired, but her clear eyes bright with indignation. "You need not trouble yourselves," she said quietly, "to discipline Wilful; and father here may never go to see her, except as a friend. We have lost her. She is gone back to her own church."

There was an expression of deep dismay on the faces of all her hearers—all except Sister Longanecker.

"Well, of all things!" cried Patience's mother.

"'T is an easy way to dodge the discipline. I hold that we should turn her out for our own credit, whether she goeth back to the Catholics or no."

"Nay, Sister Longanecker," said Swazey, the man who had been willing that his own son should be disciplined. "I am grieved to the heart, and I know that all the Society will be so grieved, that we should lose Mistress Wilful—not that we should lose her, but that she should fall thus from grace to the damnation of her own soul. Yet I think it not meet nor kind that we should attempt to discipline one who is no longer a member."

"Though my daughter's words come upon me as a distressing surprise," said the pastor, "I am not without hope in the case. The child is young, she hath been over-persuaded, her mother is a Papist; she may yet repent, and see once more the errors of Rome. I would not have her think that the Society had cast her out, nor that we love her less; rather should we love her more for her error, which needeth more love, and seek to lay hold upon her and draw her back into the fold."

At all this talk of love, Sister Longanecker looked very wild indeed. She appeared to examine the remarks, and to decide finally that there was nothing actually contraband in them. Finally she said, in a dissatisfied tone: "I fear me the Society is growing lax, Master Valentine. What would ye say now if I, or my daughter Patience here, accepted attentions from this man Burr?"

The pastor could not repress a smile. "Why, I think I should say, sister, that as you are well grounded in the true faith, and Colonel Burr a very courteous gentleman, he was like to do you no harm, and you might mayhap do him a world of good."

"Are you aware, Sister Longanecker," broke in Joy's

clear, angry tones, "that Colonel Burr hath been a frequent guest in this house—yea, and a very welcome and a pleasant guest?"

Sister Longanecker's face puckered into a most curious expression. She did know this, nor was it her fault if the thing had not become a public scandal in the Society. "I have heard say," she finally began cautiously, "but those who spoke to me were more concerned about this wayfaring man whom you have taken in."

For three years Sister Longanecker's one hope had been to steer Joyce into the haven of matrimony, when Pastor Valentine, left quite unprotected, would surely be an easy victim. She was perhaps a little mad on the subject, and every man who approached the Valentine homestead presented himself to her mind as a possible suitor for Joy. Jessop had appeared extremely available material for this use, and she regretted to do anything which might interfere with so excellent a plan. Candor, however, compelled her to mention him.

At the words, Joyce flushed and looked to her father for assistance. "I see no scandal," said Father Tobias, "in a man, be he pastor of the flock or member of the Society, succoring the needy. Nay, we are commanded so to do. I have great hope for the soul of the young brother who is with me. The Society may at any time question me in this matter or any other, but I would ask that, so far as this is concerned, they have patience and give me time, for I have, as I say to you, high hopes for his soul."

Sister Longanecker rose, wreathed in smiles, and went over to Joy, who retreated before her to the kitchen. "Well, now, if I had known that was the way of it," she whispered, "I 'd never have spoken a word. Patience says to me, she says, only this morn-

ing, 'Mommy, nobody can't live in the house with Sister Joyce Valentine without loving her.' Patience she loves you, Sister Joyce, I do assure you, just like a sister—exactly like a sister."

Joy's graceful head was held very high indeed; there was a scarlet stain on each cheek. To speak in worldly parlance, she was angry. She would have liked to shake the speaker. "I do not understand what you may be hinting at, Sister Longanecker," she said haughtily, and then proved that she did understand by adding: "I do not hold every man who giveth me 'good morrow' to have made me a tender of marriage. Master Jessop is my father's guest, not mine. I know him little, and"—with a sudden access of temper—"I like him less."

Suddenly she caught sight of Jessop's face behind Sister Longanecker's broad shoulder. He had returned from his work, and, not desiring to interrupt the men, who were still talking in the living-room, had come toward the kitchen, where Sister Longanecker's portly form blocked the doorway.

In her embarrassment and distress, Joy turned once more to her neglected bread. The pones must be ready and hot for Jessop's supper. He was working all day now in the field like a day laborer, and Joy, whose attitude toward all for whom she cared was maternal, took great thought that he should be properly fed and nourished.

Sister Longanecker's embarrassment was quite equal to Joy's, but she covered it as best she might with voluble references to what the inexhaustible Patience had said to her and what she had said in reply.

Back in the room beyond, one of the hard-featured, weather-beaten old men was in tears. He wept freely and without shame, as a child might weep,—this earnest, narrow-minded, good old man,—over the falling

from grace of a young girl with whom he had scarcely exchanged a dozen words.

To these early Christians the terms sister and brother were not empty ones; rather they stood for more than the words could mean where in the family they represent the tie of blood alone. The five old men went patiently into the details of the matter. The exact shade of the ribbon which poor Wilful had worn, its width and disposition, were in their eyes important concerns—things to be weighed and debated upon. The very tune to which she had moved her erring little feet came under consideration, and when it was known that the gown she wore was a scarlet one, that fact was held to seriously aggravate her offense.

Before the committee departed, Master Valentine recalled Sister Longanecker to the room, and they all knelt in earnest prayer. The pastor supplicated first for the erring sister, that she be led aright, that God, in his own good time, would show her the way. For themselves, he asked that they be given grace to bear with the failings of others, to look each into his own heart, and, seeing there the sin, be very merciful to those who falter or stumble openly, where their failings may be known of men.

The door was closed between the living-room and the kitchen; Jessop leaned his shoulder against the lintel, and gazed at Joy while she worked over her bread. This scrutiny did not improve her skill. She spilled the coarse, yellow meal over the snowy table, dropped her spoon with a startling clatter, and bent her head down over the pones till Jessop could see nothing but the twist of her bronze hair and the nape of her white neck.

Finally he quoted, in a reminiscent tone: "And so, Mistress Joy, you 'know me little, and like me less.' Perchance if you knew me better you would like me better; what think you?"

Joy was so long silent that he almost fancied she was not going to answer at all. Finally she began, in a very low voice: "I am sorry, Master Jessop; I was angry. 'T is a besetting sin of mine, one against which I daily pray for grace."

"What angered you, Mistress Joy?" inquired Jessop. "Was 't something I did?"

"Nay," returned Joy, with quick, innocent kindliness. "You never anger me now; 't was what Sister Loving said."

"What she said of me?" persisted Jessop. "Why, let her say what she will"—laughing a little—"she will not paint me as black as the truth."

"She spoke no ill of you; she said that you—that I—" and then Joyce quite broke down.

Jessop whistled softly, and laughed again. Joyce was putting her pones in the oven, setting that upon its bed of coals, and heaping the live coals on its lid. "So," he said, as she finished and stood up facing him, "we have gossips here in the wilderness as well as in the great world. You did well to be angry, Mistress Valentine, at your name being linked with that of a man who comes from the Lord knows where and may have done the Lord knows what." The pleasant voice dropped to a tone of bitterness as he finished.

" 'T was not that," corrected Joy, in haste to comfort him. " 'T was because there was n't any truth in what she said that I was angry."

"Mistress Joy, Mistress Joy!" cried Jessop, throwing back his head and laughing. "Now, who but Mistress Joyce Valentine would say a thing like that?" He drew nearer, flushed and smiling, and Joy retreated to her table, where she made pretense of some task to occupy her hands and still that uncomfortably tumultuous beating of the heart which, she had found, always answered this mood in Jessop.

"See, sweeting," leaning upon the table beside her,

and trying to look around into her half-averted face, "you say that you were angry because 't was not so. Then that means that you would be pleased if 't were true, doth it not?—doth it not, sweet Mistress Joy?"

Honesty kept Joy silent till she felt Jessop's arm stealing about her waist. Then she turned, and, withdrawing herself a little from him, faltered, "I do not know what 't is I feel. 'T is always pleasant to be loved, is it not, Master Jessop?" looking him honestly in the face. "And when I think so I take great delight in your words."

"Then listen," murmured Jessop, again attempting to put that ready arm about her. "I have very many of those sweet words to say to you; listen to them, sweetheart, an they please you."

But Joy again drew away, speaking in the hushed tone they had come to use—they were both a trifle frightened. "That is not all. I say that sometimes I am pleased, but sometimes I am afraid; and then I feel that it is a sin to listen to you at all. I am, you know, to be a preacher of the Word, and you belong to that world which we have renounced."

Jessop was thoroughly in earnest now; opposition was all he ever needed to produce that frame of mind. "And yet," he said reproachfully, "you claim that you love my soul, that you desire my salvation. How can you push me from you, and out into temptation? With you, beloved, I could be all that you desire. These little hands could lead me anywhere."

He had possessed himself of both the members of which he spoke so feelingly.

Joy, far from pushing him away as she had been accused of doing, drooped so close to his shoulder that a few threads of her loosened hair blew across his cheek. And the name of the next Countess of Shropshire trembled in the balance.

The sound of the departing committee, the approach of Father Tobias toward the kitchen, brought these two back from the frontiers of that dangerous fairyland toward which they had been traveling.

"Do not forget that I love you," whispered Jessop, passionately, as he pressed the little hands against his breast. "Give me speech with you again." And Joy did not say nay.

CHAPTER XV

T was three years since the treaty of San Lorenzo had given the Mississippi province to the United States.

Yet, owing to Spain's policy of delay, the Natchez district was still, in spite of the entry of some United States troops, a no-man's-land, offering an alluring field to the enterprising adventurer.

For months past, Burr's friends—spies, his enemies called them—had been busy feeling for him the public pulse.

The happiest peoples, we say, have no history. And yet we find it true that the failures, also, are apt to be dropped out of or never get into the register. Who knows of the engagement which was secretly made, and secretly broken, between two young people a hundred years ago? Where is the record of the conspiracy, freighted with hopes, beset with fears, and carefully guarded to the day of its failure by those who have been churchyard mold these fifty years?

The plotting of the Spaniards to hold this territory, the aid and countenance given them by prominent men of Tennessee and Georgia who had no mind to be cut off by a hostile power from the fine market of New Orleans, come down to us in documentary evidence.

For the other cabals we have only hints. It is certain that Ellicott, of whom Burr made much use, was ambitious to be appointed first governor of the new

territory when the United States should formally take possession. His machinations, therefore, never contemplated the dissevering of the province from this country. That he and others carried on a system of intrigue and spying, fomented quarrels between private families where it served their turn, and kept an unwritten record of every man's politics and possibilities, lives in tradition and upon the pages of many a musty, little-read history of the times. But later, when conditions were much more unfavorable for such a venture, Aaron Burr was attainted of this very treason.

What his ultimate ambition was in 1798 regarding the Mississippi territory will now never be known. It seems likely, from the temper of the man as it appears to us in this day, that his hopes reached forward to the founding of an empire, and not a republic. Had success waited upon his efforts, there would have been another face in our gallery of heroes and patriots. But he failed. Failure and treason are apt to be one in this world.

It was March, 1798. The time approached when, if any blow was to be struck, it could no longer be delayed. Since Jessop's convalescence and his conspicuous appearance at the ball, Colonel Burr had thought best to discontinue his visits to Pastor Valentine's house, lest the attention of his friends the enemy—as represented by the Spanish commandant and garrison —be unduly attracted to his movements. Yet communication between the two men was not wanting.

Wilful having gone back to her own church, the relations between the Guions and their Spanish neighbors were again harmonious. Burr was more continually than ever at "Half-way Cottage," and he frequently joined Jessop when the latter was on his way to or from "The Meadows." These meetings did not take place upon the highroad, but usually in a little

grove of beech and magnolia through which Jessop passed to reach the farm gate. Here earnest confabulations were held, Burr walking with his horse's bridle looped over his arm. Frequently they were joined by two or three others. These brought information, oral messages, but never a scrap of written paper.

The recklessness in Jessop's nature, which went so closely hand in hand with generosity and gay good humor that it almost seemed another virtue, inclined him to lend a ready ear to such matters as were discussed at these meetings. Then, too, he was in urgent need of money. David paid him the wage of a working-man, which, unskilled as he was, he felt that he scarcely earned. The thought of again appealing for aid to those at home was bitter. The idea of selling such articles of value as had come in the great chest of clothing never occurred to him. He had wrenched away the diamond star and buckles from his white suit and pawned them long ago. A gentleman pawns his jewels, but he does not turn old clo'-man and sell his cast-off apparel.

The sign agreed upon between these conspirators—if conspirators they were—was that when a general meeting was called, a little bundle of sticks should be sent to each member of the band, the number signifying how many days should elapse before the meeting. The rendezvous was always the little grove; the time, sunrise.

One day, as Jessop was departing for his work, he turned back. "Mistress Joyce," he called, and then finding her alone in the living-room, "Joy, one may come here—a little Indian lad, mayhap—with somewhat for me. If I am absent when the messenger arrives, will you keep that which he brings, and not fail to give it to me on my return?"

"Why, that depends," returned Joyce, saucily. She

was learning to be at ease in Jessop's company, and perhaps learning other lessons which he was at much patient pains to teach her.

"It depends, doth it, sweetheart—and upon what?" he asked.

"Well, for one thing," answered Joy, "it depends upon whether that which the boy brings be anything I want for myself. Mayhap if 't is I shall keep it."

Jessop shook his head smilingly. "Nay, 't is nothing you would want," he said.

"Well, then," pursued Joy, "it depends on whether I think the thing is something which will be good for you. If I believe this, then I may give it you."

" 'T will be naught but a little bundle of sticks," explained Jessop; "just little barky twigs. And pray you, dearest, do not unbind them, for the number will have a significance to me."

Across Joy's mind flashed Massawippa's story of the stolen arrows. For some reason, she knew not what, she caught her breath, dropped all jesting, and began to speak in sober earnest. " 'T is a signal," she said; "I feel it is. You are to meet some one, somewhere, in just so many days as there be sticks in the bunch. I know it."

Her face was so troubled that Jessop, delighted at the emotion he had aroused, drew near and caught her hand. "You are jealous, Joy!" he cried boyishly. "Sweetheart, you do love me a little! But indeed here is no reason for jealousy. There is but one Joy in the world for me, and she is here."

For once, Joy let his tender words pass quite unrebuked. "What is this thing must needs be done so secretly?" she questioned. "That which is right fears not the day."

"Well, then, I promise you, my heart, that I shall, by reason of those twigs, go nowhere but from here

to 'The Meadows,' and at my usual time. I shall meet by the way, so far as I now know, none but men. Will that content my jealous sweetheart?"

"No, I am not jealous"—a little impatiently—"yes, I am. I am jealous for your soul, Master Jessop. I would not have you fall again into sin."

Jessop puckered his lips as if to whistle, and looked a trifle annoyed. Making love to the prettiest Puritan in the world is a tantalizing piece of business. "You Methodists," he expostulated, "are full of quibbles. How can you be jealous for a man's soul and not for the man himself?"

Joy sighed. "I fear you are right," she answered meekly. "I pray daily for grace, but I know that I am very faulty; I can never tell whether these impulses which seem to me strongest and most beautiful in my heart come really from God or no."

Father Tobias, searching for the hundredth time for the book which he had been reading and the loose sheets upon which he had been making notes, called to his daughter from the room above.

"If they come I shall burn them," whispered Joyce, defiantly, as she pulled away her hand.

"Aye, burn them—burn them! I shall exact a kiss for each stick," laughed Jessop, "and pray, in that case, that there be many of them."

All day, about her household tasks, the puzzle of this thing followed Joy. She was the material of which prophetess and priestess are made. A very little hint led her instinctively to the truth of any matter, especially where her heart was engaged. Now, as she swept and dusted and scrubbed and garnished, there came together in her mind a dozen half-forgotten things which persuaded her that Jessop's appointment was with Colonel Burr.

Her guess was not so wonderful as it may seem. It

was an open secret which anybody—even the Methodists, who held themselves a people apart not only from the Spanish Catholics, but from the other creeds among their own countrymen—might know, that there was political ferment abroad in the land, that not one but many conspiracies were afoot, and that there was danger of the territory going back to Spain. Further than this Joyce could not, of course, imagine.

Spain—old Catholic Spain—stood to Joy's people for the antichrist. The prospect of speedy deliverance from Spanish rule had been hailed by them with hosannas. The feebleness of the efforts made by the United States to hold the land was regarded with terror. That Jessop should be concerned with anything which might be inimical to the United States government seemed to her very terrible, but quite possible. He was an Englishman. Little as she knew of him, she well understood that his sympathies were with his own people in the matter of the Revolution—a rebellion, he called it.

Late in the day, when she had begun to look down the path by which Jessop might be expected, came one of Master David's negro farm-hands, bearing a letter addressed to Mistress Joyce Valentine.

Joyce had received three letters in her life; of these, one was a note from Lady Connor, accompanying a little gift of books sent to her on her fourteenth birthday. The others came from Father Tobias during that memorable time when he went East to hear Barbara Heck preach. Lady Connor's letter was a thin, sweet-scented, silken little thing, written in the cramped, delicate hand of age. It was formal though affectionate, and there were in it many beautiful phrases, which Joyce learned by heart and still treasured in her mind. It appeared to her at fourteen the most wonderful and beautiful epistle ever penned.

Father Tobias's two letters were models, according to the standards of that day and time, of all that a father's letters should be. They conveyed much information, they administered much good advice, and they now reposed in Joy's little casket, along with her handkerchiefs, her hymnal, and sundry sprigs of lavender. But something in her inexperienced heart told her that this letter was a different affair. It was written on heavy, rough paper, sealed with the signet ring Jessop always wore, and addressed in a bold, practised masculine hand. The very letters which formed her own name upon it looked, to her eye, masterful and encroaching. She took it with a fluttering heart, bade the negro sit down on the kitchen doorstep, and fled to her little attic room to read it.

This was the letter:

"SWEETHEART: I am detained to-night by Master David's entreaties. We are setting the new Gin in place, and Master Batchelor is so impatient that we will work all night to be ready for the ginning by Daylight. Since I shall not sleep, Dear One, I shall not dream of you; but my thoughts, Heart's Delight, will be with you as always. I shall send a Thousand little Loves to flutter about your Pillow and whisper to you of me, so that your Dreams may be of no other. I send you, Dearest, the Kisses which you would not let me give you, were I there. And I am, Beloved,

"Yours always,

"JESSOP."

Can any other communication ever be to a woman like her first love-letter? The characters written by Jessop at speed and carelessly seemed alive before Joy's eyes. She put down her fingers and caressed the lines, and then blushing, though there was none to see the

action, she raised and kissed them gently as one might kiss a baby's cheek.

The words were music, and, to her simple mind, so much more binding, so much truer, than mere spoken words. She had read the letter over for perhaps the twentieth time, and was beginning to think that she would better go back and dismiss its bearer, when a little dusky head rose solemnly through the opening of the stairway, and a diminutive Indian boy presented for her inspection a couple of twigs bound tightly together with a cotton twine.

"Who sent it, Tohopeka?" she questioned. The boy shook his head.

"Who is it for?" she next asked.

"Him," was all the reply she could extort. It was evidently the message which Jessop had been expecting.

"When did you get it?" she persisted.

"Yesterday," he answered laconically.

"Why did n't you bring it then?"

"Fishing," he replied, apparently much bored by her inquisition.

She took the sticks and the letter, and laid them one upon the other in her treasure-box. Then she went below, dismissed the negro, and set about her preparations for Father Tobias's supper.

It was the first time since his convalescence that Jessop's presence had been wanting at the board, and they both missed him sorely. He was subject to moods of depression, of almost savage gloom, but the ruling spirit of his nature was gaiety, and, as Father Tobias said, he seemed when gone to take some of the sunshine with him.

Jessop may have sent the winged loves to Joy's pillow that night, but perchance the little wanderers were scared by the desolate land in which they found themselves, or lost upon the way; for the dreams Joy had,

if troubled, half-waking visions such as hers may be called dreams, were far from pleasant.

In the morning she rose while it was yet dark, donned her gray homespun dress, and added, more for concealment than for warmth, though the morning air had its own sharp chill, the long gray homespun cloak and hood. Then she slipped the sticks and the letter into her pocket and set forth.

Jessop had said that he would obey the signal by going at his usual time to "The Meadows." Well, she would go somewhat earlier than was his wont, and she doubted not that she should meet upon the way evidence of what the sign meant.

The slim, erect, vigorous young figure stepped from the low portal into the new-born day. Dawn was just brushing aside a few lingering cobwebs which night had woven lightly above the eastern horizon. The daily resurrection held no novelty for Joy; but, roused to keener seeing by the trouble in her soul, its hope and beauty thrilled her afresh. The little listening world of cane and beech and magnolia was new created. The wing-tips of God's angels who had builded all its splendors and its peace had but just vanished from the skies; the breath of their going still trembled fragrant in the tree-tops.

At the gate she stopped an instant to snood her bright, defiant locks more snugly, glancing out toward the roadway and then back to the little nestling cabin. It was dark with the stains of many winters. Its great bark logs served prettily for background, and about, on, in, and under them twined and clambered riotous honeysuckle. Its venturesome trumpet-bells, in every shade from cream to yellow, had snared a myriad honey-bees out for their early gathering. From the tall locust back in the fowl-yard came the warning cluck of one of Joy's feathered brood, and even as she lin-

gered chicks and ducks and geese began their matin calls.

Satan came out to her, purring himself into a gray ball, his green eyes blinking lovingly into her face. "Nay, nay, Satan," protested Joy, as he signified his desire to accompany her; "I fear me your namesake hath found some mischief for mine idle hands, but I must e'en go to it alone."

She turned toward the woodland from which a roadway led to "The Meadows." It was here at the farther end she was to keep Jessop's tryst. The wood still gloomed beneath the uncertain light. Her feet slipped noiselessly through brown, decaying leaves dropped months ago in gold and crimson glory from autumn's crowded hands. She noted an occasional blue eye a-peep from earth's dark face, and, stooping, gathered a bunch of early violets which she grouped against a curved heart-leaf and held, scarce conscious that she did so, to her lips. Their dewy freshness was grateful to her.

About the dark, shining magnolias spiders had set their silver wheels. These, interlooped with the shadowy Spanish moss, added a pallid mystery to the tall woodland. Everywhere dew lay like a sylvan baptism. The air was indescribably fresh and spicy, as if Dawn had crushed her lips to earth and leaf and root, and drawn forth their richest aroma to perfume the coming day. Overhead a new-wakened mocker dropped down a trickle of song to saturate the girl's uneasy soul.

She looked up through the interlacing boughs and caught the deepened blue of the sky. Great ribbons of sunlight, dyed in purple and gold and crimson, streamed and knotted about the east. All the magic and the beauty and the peace sang irresistibly into her fretted spirit, and Joy reached the grove in her serenest mood.

She was, though of course she could not know it, somewhat ahead of time. She walked the length of the grove without seeing a soul, and was about to turn and retrace her steps. "I was mistaken," she thought; "how foolish I have been!" And upon the instant, the voice of Colonel Burr remarked behind her shoulder: "You are early abroad, Mistress Valentine, and looking as fair as the day-dawn itself."

For answer, Joyce turned silently and held out to him the two little twigs bound with frayed cord. "Why, what have we here?" inquired Burr, taking and inspecting them with apparent curiosity. "Is it a sign or token?"

"It is, Colonel Burr," returned Joyce. "'T is a sign and a token of man's treachery. Ask me not how I know of this, but believe me that I do know."

Burr looked piercingly at the girl. His estimate of the situation was that Jessop had told her all he knew, and that she, dominating the man, as the stronger nature always does the weaker, had forced him to remain at home while she came in his stead.

Her first words undeceived him. "I ask two things of you, sir," she said—"nay, I demand them of you. One is that you do not tell Master Jessop of my being here—I shall tell him myself. The other is that you leave him—poor, weak, tempted, unhappy gentleman—out of your councils."

"Why, Mistress Valentine," retorted Burr, "you are none too modest in your demands. How know you that we have councils, or that to be in them is not best for your friend? Your lover would perhaps be the more accurate designation."

Joyce flushed painfully, but she stood her ground. "Will you deny," she urged, "that you sent the twigs, or had them sent? Can you say that I am mistaken? You cannot. Then, pray you, leave Master Jessop

alone. No good can come of this; 't is a secret matter, something of which you are ashamed, of which you are afraid to write and set your hand to the writing," and she glanced down at the sticks, where he had dropped them in the mosses by the path.

Burr saw one or two of the men whom he had associated with him in his secret work entering the grove on their way to the rendezvous. The sight spurred his temper. Joy was greatly in his way. "Look you here, Mistress Joyce Valentine," he began, "you Methodists bear the name of being meddling folk; and I have the woman yet to see who has not a tattling tongue. Let this matter get abroad through fault of yours, and I 'll find means to settle with this fine gentleman lover."

Joyce was all courage; for herself she was not afraid, she dreaded only the failure of her mission. "Colonel Burr," she answered, unscared, "I do not know you in such guise as this. I do believe this speech belies you, and for my part I still will trust you so far that if you pledge me what I ask, I will in turn give you my word to speak of this matter to none."

Burr did not relish being worsted by a girl. Also he had need of Jessop.

"Mistress Valentine," he said, becoming once more the winning gentleman and charming friend whom she had formerly known, "I crave your pardon for my hasty words. Come, let us reason together. This man Jessop is, in point of fact, according to the best accounts of him, a profligate fellow. He hath lived a life of debauchery since he was old enough to choose for himself, and run through such fortune as he was born to. What hath Mistress Joyce Valentine, daughter of Pastor Valentine, to do with such a man as that? What hath she to do with him, I ask of you?"

"I pray you," interrupted Joy, unsteadily, "forget

that I am a woman, and a young woman. Remember only that I am one who hath been called to preach the Word. Shall a soul be more than a soul to me—or less —because it be lodged in the body of a man?"

"Who talks of saving and damning souls?" inquired Burr, lightly. "Why, Mistress Joyce, this is the sheerest nonsense. Men have oft their affairs which they do not tell to the world at large, their secret societies, their intrigues and cabals. 'T is only a woman whose life must be, like a chained book in a temple, open to all comers. Nay, I 'll not hurt your penitent's soul. I will return it you in good order. You have not been so careful, I warrant me, of his heart."

Joyce sighed impatiently. "Will you give me your promise?" she persisted doggedly.

Burr laughed, and owned to himself that he was beaten. "Why, needs must, it seems—needs must, when a certain personage, who shall be nameless, drives, or so the saying goes. You leave me no choice, I think."

The sneering lightness of the promise did not daunt Joy. "And will you keep your vow?" she asked— "keep it as though 't were made to a man?"

At the frankness of her words, Burr flushed a little. His reputation as a trifler with women was a source of pride to him; but somehow before Joyce Valentine's honest eyes the thing took on, momentarily, another color. "The devil even, Mistress Joy," he remarked, "is said to be less black than he is painted. Believe or believe not all that you have heard of me; but this one thing is sure, I have given you my promise, and you may trust my word."

"I thank you, sir," said Joyce, and turned away.

This girl had gone in fearless innocency, without conception of the risk, to keep tryst at day-dawn with a man of national ill repute in affairs of the heart.

She had not come, as Burr supposed, counting the cost, and willing for love's sake to face the risk. The actuating motive, inconceivable to him, was duty to a soul she felt to be trembling in the balance. She loved the soul, only half comprehending that the man was grown most dear to her.

After the meeting with his friends in the grove, Burr took his way under the magnolias to the hedge at the side of "Half-way Cottage." Here he paused, and whistled low a bird-call of two or three soft, sliding notes. He waited, and repeated the signal. There was a movement within doors, and Mistress Wilful Guion first pushed aside the curtain to look out, then, opening the door, came swiftly across to the hedge. "Is the mother awake?" asked Burr, quietly.

"No," she returned, in the same hushed tone, "but you will breakfast with us, will you not?"

"Presently," said Burr; "now I want to talk to you. Can you come and walk awhile under the trees?"

Wilful turned back to give some directions to the servant, brought her wide garden hat, and passed through a gap in the hedge in submissive silence. It was plain her attitude toward him was one of adoring obedience. When they had gone some little distance he turned, drew his arm closely about her, and kissed her—not once, but many times. "There," he said, "you were such a pale, woe-begone little mustard-seed that I could take no delight in you. Now you are a blushing Hebe."

The girl raised to his a glorified face—a face so radiant with love and youth and beauty that one could scarce feel surprise if even he was momentarily turned aside by its spell from the path of his ambition. Morning's damp wind had loosed the little dusky curls about her forehead. Her complexion was of a peculiar delicacy most unusual with dark hair and eyes.

Her color was a rich carnation stain which lends that vivid look—an almost hectic beauty—which old-fashioned people, and those given to gloomy prophesyings, declare is only to be found upon faces not long for this world.

Burr looked at this exquisite creature by his side, and his soul was melted to a tenderness quite foreign to the cold, ambitious mold of the man. "And now, my Wilful sweetheart, did they discipline you for going to the ball all for to please this ancient, silvery-haired old lover of yours?" He pushed back the brown locks on his temples, inconspicuously streaked by some few silver threads.

"They could not discipline me," answered poor Wilful, somberly; "I have gone back to my mother's church. I could not face them."

At this Burr knitted his brows. A sweetheart who went to confessional was not to his taste. "Why did you that?" he asked. "Must a woman always have a church?"

"It pleased my mother," replied Wilful, wearily; "and for myself, I did not care."

"Why do it, then?" repeated Burr.

"You do not object to it?" she inquired anxiously. "I thought, since you were not satisfied to have me a Methodist, you would be glad I should go back."

"Nay," demurred Burr, lightly, "I would have you to have no church but that of which I am priest; no religion but that which still finds me supreme. 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me,' dear heart."

And Wilful, turning, whispered, his arms about her and her face pressed in against his breast, "Sometimes I think I have not."

CHAPTER XVI

HE Spanish garrison withdrew from Fort Rosalie at Natchez, and, joining the troops from Fort Nogales, went on down the river to New Orleans but a few days after Joy's interview with Burr.

Ellicott, accused by his enemies of no worse than being to the Spaniards "a proper plaything suited to the theme of evasion," was informed one night, "through a confidential channel," of this proposed evacuation. He arose next morning at four o'clock, walked to the fort, and found the last party, or rear-guard, just leaving it. Seeing the gate open, he went in, and, as he rather quaintly puts it, "enjoyed from the parapet the pleasant prospect of the galleys and boats getting under way." And at eight o'clock Captain Guion's men had unfurled the American flag over the fort.

There was still before the territory a factional struggle between its own "Little Council" and "Permanent Committee." All conspiracies to sever it from the United States had failed. Yet it appears that the authorities must have gotten some wind of a contemplated "grand coup," for three of the men who met with Burr that morning in the grove were, almost directly after the Spanish evacuation, arrested upon United States warrants. These warrants, it is true,

charged them with various offenses and none specified conspiracy, but they were sent to Philadelphia for trial.

Colonel Burr himself appears to have been unsuspected at this time, and he followed the Spanish garrison to New Orleans.

The explanation seems to be that the United States occupation and the appointment of Winthrop Sargent as governor of the Mississippi territory came, like all long-delayed things, with unexpected suddenness. Burr's plans were still inchoate. No actual move was made, and, as is usual in such cases, the man at the head escaped with the lightest breath of suspicion, while his lieutenants and tools suffered.

Jessop was somewhat taken aback by the arrests. He was helping Joyce at corn-shelling. They sat at the work in an open doorway beneath the tender effulgence of the moon, while within Father Tobias, by a light much less brilliant, bent over his books and papers. The young people spoke in lowered tones, partly that they might not disturb the old man and partly with a view to having their conversation to themselves.

Joyce mentioned the family of one of the men who had been arrested, and said she pitied them.

"They are shiftless creatures," she added, "and, I warrant me, will be upon the town ere poor William is released."

"Know you the real cause of this man's arrest?" asked Jessop.

"I believe that I can guess," returned Joy.

"'T was for attending some meetings," explained Jessop—"meetings at which I also was present. Why I should have been left when others were taken, is more than I can say." Then, after a thoughtful pause: "The man at the head of the affair is left, too. He hath gone on down the river with the Spaniards."

"Colonel Burr," supplied Joyce.

"How know you?" cried Jessop, in astonishment.

"Oh, I know that," returned Joy. "And methinks I know, too, why you were not arrested. Wait, Master Jessop; I have a confession to make."

She ran up to her little room, and, returning with the two sticks she had picked up and brought away from her interview with Burr, laid them in Jessop's hand. "So they were sent, then," he commented. "The colonel did not drop me, as I fancied. Where got you these?"

"They were brought to the house," returned Joyce, quietly, "by the little Indian lad Tohopeka, and I kept them from you. 'T was the night you stayed at Master Batchelor's to help him set the gin, you mind." The remembrance of the letter he had sent, and which she had worn with many foldings and unfoldings and much carrying about, till it was breaking at the creases —the letter which even then lay warm above her heart —brought a soft brightness to Joy's face.

"You did keep them, then—you did it! Meseems that at the time we had some talk of a forfeit for such behavior. Art ready to pay it now, mistress?" He looked laughingly at her. Something in the passionless kindness of the girl's aspect, but more perhaps in that serious feeling toward her which he found daily growing in his heart, reproved the lightness of his speech, and made him forbear further reference to his jesting threat.

It was not Joy's self who did so, for even as she shook her head in negation she smiled at him with something of that indulgent smile a mother gives a too importunate child.

" 'T would seem that Colonel Burr was easily discouraged," Jessop went on, striking the sticks together as he held them. " 'T was not like him to give me up because I failed to keep an appointment; perchance he cared not much for my assistance."

"That is not all. I kept the sticks, and then I went and spoke to Colonel Burr myself," confessed Joy.

"To Burr?" cried Jessop, turning quite about to face her. "Why, Joy!" He mused a moment. "Colonel Burr, if I mistake not the man, would have been rough with you then, and taunted you with appealing to him on behalf of a lover. Is not that what he said?"

"Yes," replied Joyce, faintly, "he said that, and much more. But he promised me that he would spare you, and he did spare you, so I was content."

Jessop bent his head and looked with brooding eyes at the corn-basket between his knees. All the worth of this which she had done for him was bright before his eyes, spread upon the background of his own doubtful performances. He said: "I am a hound, not worth the saving. But had I been arrested and sent on to Philadelphia for trial with these three other scapegoats, there are more would have suffered than my unworthy self alone. There is an old man over in England, Joy; he is getting very old and feeble now, and he hath had five sons; three of them be dead, and one has brought him naught but trouble."

"Yourself," breathed Joy.

Jessop nodded. "Now, had this thing happened to me which your wit and kindness hath averted, this old man's name, his honorable name—it is a very great name, dearest, and hath come down to him unspotted for nigh a thousand years—his name and mine would have been dragged through the mud, in the courts of this little twopenny-ha'penny republic, which had been glad, methinks, to see one of our breed so humiliated."

He was silent, looking at her seriously and considerингly. Surely the woman who had saved the name from disgrace was fit to bear it. "Joy," he said, in a little, hushed undertone, "will you marry me?"

He had been so occupied with his own point of view,

so concerned with the thought that this Methodist parson's daughter was no mate for a possible heir to one of the oldest titles in England, that he was quite unprepared for her reply. It came upon him like a sudden sousing of cold water, when Joy's sweet face went first red, then white, and she answered in a voice even lower than his own:

"I don't know—no. Oh, why did you ask me that? You are of the world's people, and I have my life consecrated and set apart."

Yet when he rose there was a confident smile upon his lips. "We will talk to your father about it, Joyce," he said very tenderly and kindly, as he reached his hand to raise her from the step.

Thus, hand in hand, this son of a hundred earls and the simple backwoodsman's daughter, they went in together, and stood before Father Tobias like two children.

The old man looked up at them inquiringly, took off his spectacles, wiped them, put them on, and looked again. Their attitude told him the story, and a world of protest showed itself in his usually calm face.

"It has come," announced Jessop, still smiling a little—"the time which comes to every father—the time when you must give her up."

"I hope not," said Father Tobias, gravely. "How is it, my Joy?"

Joy's face was burning with blushes. "I do not know, father," she protested. "I would have you to choose for me."

"Nay, child," returned her father; "that is what one soul may not do for another."

Then, turning to Jessop, he said, with a sort of reproof: "I think, Master Jessop, you do not indeed want my daughter. Another damsel, who was fair and young, might be fitting wife for a worldly man like

yourself; but this child here is not as other women. She hath had a call to preach the Word. I feel that she belongs to God and to her own people. Indeed, Master Jessop, you must think again."

Jessop had been hounded through two London seasons by bold young beauties, to whom his wealth and rank made him a coveted quarry. He had been, more than once, well-nigh run to earth by those more privileged scourers of the field—mothers and aunts of damsels who must be wed. Opposition from this unexpected quarter fanned his desire for Joyce Valentine to a very flame. His better part was already engaged in the matter, and now the reckless, frivolous side—the side that brooked no opposition—answered to this challenge.

He told Pastor Valentine of his birth and rank. His father was Earl of Shropshire. "But," he added eagerly, "I am a younger son, and a black sheep. There is naught to prevent my choosing a people and a land of my own. If Joy can love me, my family will—though I have run through one patrimony, more shame to me!—be glad to provide such moneys as will here give us ease, even luxury."

Jessop saw, and with mounting ardor, that these considerations moved Father Tobias and Joyce not at all. He sought other argument. He urged the pastor to think what good might be accomplished with this wealth. He averred that he would not stand between Joy and her calling, and insisted that he had no thought of ever living elsewhere than in the Americas, or being other than a plain country gentleman. He doubted not that, with Joyce to guide him, he should be converted and eventually join the Society.

And all that Father Tobias would do was to gently shake his obstinate old head and repeat: "Well, well, we shall see, Master Jessop. We will take time to consider these things."

The day following, Jessop, thwarted and unhappy, sulking like a child who has been denied a new toy, took his grievance to David Batchelor. David heard him through, and answered with great moderation:

"But look you, Master Jessop—I shall still call you so, shall I not?—the man of whom you think so hardly hath but one daughter. This child of his love, the staff of his declining years, you expect him to hand over to the first passing stranger who desires her, and to add, 'Thank ye kindly.' 'T is not reasonable."

Jessop was not inclined to regard himself in the light of an ordinary passer-by. He naturally considered that the Earl of Shropshire's son was a very fine match indeed for a humble Methodist parson's daughter, and in the course of their conversation he made so much clear to David.

"Aye," said Batchelor, smilingly, "why, so 't is. But in this case you have come to the place where neither riches nor rank will avail ye. 'T is as though you had died and gone to heaven, so far as that 's concerned. Pastor Valentine would sooner give his daughter to you to wife were you the scum of the earth, without a cent in your pocket or a second coat to your back, an he believed you one of the Lord's chosen."

Over these statements Jessop swore with point and fluency—the more, that he knew them to be exactly true.

"Now, Master Jessop," added the other, "Pastor Valentine desires to see me, here or at his own house, to consult me, as I suspect, upon this very matter, and I shall give him a piece of advice which ought, I think, to please you."

Jessop was moved to suggest that David assure Father Tobias that never again would such a match come Joy's way. But he forbore.

David concluded: "I believe that Mistress Joy hath that in her which would be the making of a great lady."

Jessop agreed warmly.

"I say," continued Batchelor, "that I think the world calls her strongly, but I also believe that Joyce Valentine's spiritual nature will never be satisfied with the things of the world."

"Pah—canting humbug!" fumed Jessop; "you speak as though I were Sathanus himself. Why should her spiritual growth be dwarfed because she is my wife? Have I not said that I will buy a plantation? She may preach the Word, and, for aught I care, fill the house from garret to cellar with Methodies. 'T is Joy I want. For her sake I would e'en turn Methody myself, and sing psalms through my nose with the best of them."

"I marvel greatly, Master Jessop," cried David, laughing, "at this state of spiritual exaltation which I find in you. Methinks, could Pastor Tobias and Mistress Joyce hear your words, the maid were yours."

Jessop flushed. "I have told them so," he admitted, "but not exactly in those words. One trims one's speech a bit when courting."

"And after marriage 't is no such matter," supplied Batchelor, dryly. "In my appreciation of this fact, Master Jessop, I shall advise my old friend to let his daughter, ere you be wedded, or even betrothed, make experiment of this worldly life into which she would, as your wife, inevitably go. Let the child try her wings," he added softly, more to himself than to the other. "Perchance she will come back to the nest like a homing pigeon."

"A capital idea, Master Batchelor! Well thought of! 'T is even as Father Tobias says; you are a man 'excellent in counsel.' I have a cousin in New York, wife to one of the high officials there. This husband is a scurvy fellow, of whom we have thought little because he turned against his country in the rebellion of

the colonies. Yet he hath money and standing, and my cousin is a gentlewoman. They will be right glad to receive Mistress Joy for my sake, and thus patch, if they may, the breach between themselves and my family."

"I think, Master Jessop," amended David, "that 't were better, as there is to be no promise of marriage, Mistress Joyce went to her own people. Master Valentine never mentions the fact—'t is not known in this community—yet his brothers are men of wealth as well as fine breeding. One, an elder brother, I believe, is not more than a fortnight's journey, at most, from here."

Jessop looked his surprise. "If she be really to see the world," he suggested, with an irrepressible touch of arrogance, "methinks 't were better she went to a city—or so near that thing as there is in this uncouth land—and lodge with people of—of—"

"So say I," interrupted David. "And surely New Orleans—'t is there her uncle lives—is wicked enough for the purpose. There will be no dearth of money. Master Valentine put by all those things when he put by the world, but other members of his family do not lack for means."

A curious change had come over Jessop's face during this speech. "Why New Orleans?" he inquired brusquely.

"Why not New Orleans?" countered David. And the other was at a loss to say.

Both men turned, as they reached this conversational deadlock, and saw the figure of Father Tobias coming up the pathway toward the house. Jessop, with his usual delicacy, withdrew, that the others might speak more freely. David had chairs brought, and they seated themselves on the wide gallery.

"Belike, Master Jessop hath told you the nature of

my errand this morning, friend Batchelor," began Father Tobias, and David bowed his assent.

"What think you?" asked the elder man, wistfully. "Am I another old hen, screaming vainly at her duckling in the pool, and fearing for it mightily because she herself was not born to swim? Am I indeed such an old hen, or is this not a strange and unsuitable match?"

"Not altogether. No," returned Batchelor, thoughtfully. "Bethink you, sir, Mistress Joyce hath a many-sided nature. That fervor and zeal which called her to the speaking of the Word may burn full as brightly to light for her the lamps of pleasure. She hath delight in many things which your strait creed denies her."

The pastor sighed. "I have often thought so," he admitted. "Yet, after all, is not that earnest young Christian who would be indeed a daughter to me the true Joyce?"

"I think it is," agreed the other; "but unproved, untried fealty is not the thing which you or I, Master Valentine, desire to see in your daughter." He put before her father his plan for giving Joy an opportunity to see the things of the world and test herself, going more fully into details than he had done with Jessop. At the end of all, he suggested that there was a fund upon which the pastor had been used to draw in cases of need, and which was now quite as much at his service to provide all that was necessary for the journey and the visit.

"I think," he concluded, "that both you and I, friend, are able to see your daughter go into the world—if 't is there she really belongs—and to believe that God can bless her wherever she goes. I know that we both will have more joy in it if, having tried the things of the world, she freely renounce them, as you and

I have each done, and come back to her simple faith and simple life, than to think she should live here, longing perhaps for these things to the last, though outwardly holding to the faith."

"David Batchelor," said the preacher, "heaven has denied me a son of my body. But, to compensate therefor, God sent me you, I think, as the son of my spirit."

"If you follow it," suggested Batchelor, much moved, "I doubt not that this advice I offer will subject you to grave criticism from the Society."

"In nothing," returned Father Tobias, "do you show your spiritual kinship to me more strongly than in the knowing that such consideration would not weigh with me. This maid of whom we speak is my only child. She must not live a thwarted, imperfect life. I dare not, at this turning-point, risk that she make, through ignorance, a false step; or that, held ignorant now, she fall hereafter into error."

"And whatever comes will be right," added David, drawing upon the wells of his philosophy.

"But God will take care of his own," supplemented Father Tobias, peacefully. His comfort came from a deeper source. "I thank you for the proffer of the money, my son; it will be necessary, and I accept it as freely as 't is offered."

Here Jessop, who was too full of restless ferment to work, came through the house and joined them.

He had sent letters to England. He had ordered, though appearing a trifle doubtful of results, certain possessions of his own sent up the river to him from a place which he vaguely designated as "below."

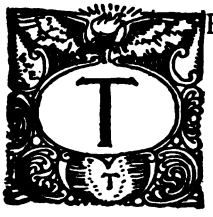
Batchelor watched the two men depart—Father Tobias, always impressive, a noble and touching figure, yet with a very simple dignity; his companion, light, alert, elegant, fine gentleman from the crown of his

head to the sole of his shoe, graceful always, even in rags. As David studied Jessop's debonair bearing, and remembered the disfavor with which the proposition that Joyce go to New Orleans had been received by him, he wondered a little if it were not in that particular city that this handsome young prodigal's last meal of husks had been eaten. The words of Father Tobias, who had said to him, "I hoped she might have chosen, nearer home, a man of her own world," were recalled to David by the contrast between the two figures—their absolute incongruity.

And again, as he looked, he murmured, "Why not New Orleans?"

THE WORLD

CHAPTER XVII



HE big, strong, muddy stream which flows past these river towns and plantations of Mississippi, showing its ancient contempt for the puny plans of mankind by every toss of its ragged, tawny mane, furnishes much of the romance, the song, story, and legend, of the dwellers on its banks. And at the last they find it involved, too, in most of the practical affairs of their lives.

The open thoroughfare which first allured these valiant pioneers into this wilderness, it remained their line of communication with that world they had left behind them. It carried away to market the products of their labor, and brought them back the price therefor—along with somewhat aged news of the world's doings.

For all this, the shambling, unreplying, hostile, serviceable creature took toll, lawless, irregular, arbitrary. Now, a life—two lives; again, a boat, with its hopeful freight of goods and lives; or a broad, rich, profitable slice of plantation, with lives on it too, mayhap, all swallowed up—boats, merchandise, plantation, crops, and lives—in a moment of the day or of the night, indifferently.

Down this great primeval highway, sinister, beneficent, set thick with nature's splendors, bristling with half-conjectured robbers and slayers, father and child

had come twelve years before. And now once more, in late March and early April, they took their way down the stream in a flat-boat, going back to and not away from the world.

The journey to New Orleans occupied several days, and at this time was made in flat-boats and keel-boats. Men who could endure the hardship went down in their canoes. Planters living near the city had well-kept skiffs, with gay awnings, whose negro oarsmen sang as they rowed.

The river banks were one tangle of greenery and bloom. It was as though nature had trimmed for Joy a royal route into fairyland. Great tulip-trees hung their reversed chalices above the current. Monster live-oaks and sycamores raised shadowy banners of gray moss. An occasional orchard or inland garden sent messages of sweetness out to the voyagers as they passed. The dogwood flung a white flag among the darkness of the beeches. Garlands of the yellow jessamine flaunted everywhere, showering largess of scented gold upon the sliding water.

The flat-boat was a big, rough craft, with two small cabins, in which the men and women were stowed away like documents in pigeonholes. An awning of unbleached cotton cloth furnished some protection from the sun.

Joy could not have said when she was first assailed by a stealthy doubt of the religious dogmas in which she had been born and reared. It came thief-like, and strove secretly to steal away that firm belief which had been to her thought always the one invincible fastness of her soul. Finally she began to dare to judge the repression, the narrowness, the infinite dreariness of the creed by which her Society lived. Antagonistic always to the breadth and humanness, the sunny, uplooking hopefulness of the girl's rich nature, it now be-

came distasteful. Yet she was, from force of habit, still holding to the doctrines of her former faith. It was the one bit of untruth which had crept into Joyce Valentine's sound wholesomeness.

The tumult of their preparations had left her little time for thought. Whether these new, unrestful emotions which possessed her were pain or pleasure was still undetermined in her mind.

That she longed to see the world, she knew. That she loved Jessop, she was not sure. That her soul was a mirror to the pageant of life's beauty, a harp to the wind of its pulsing music, an empty chalice waiting to be brimmed with the wine of its pleasure, she was beginning to find out.

A virgin, grazed by the wing of Love, not yet quite enthralled by his exigent bondage, is apotheosized. She becomes a poet, a musician, a bacchante, a saint. The intoxication of actual living projects her fancy into a hundred lives other than her own. She would fain taste all waters, that she may judge for herself which is the Water of Life.

There were other passengers aboard the flat-boat, and great piles of merchandise. Joyce held herself a little apart from the rest, and took counsel of her own thoughts.

There was an old French Canadian, going for the first time down the river with his wife. This brown-faced, quaint, vivacious old fellow was so charmed with the opulence and beauty of the scenes through which they drifted that he harangued Father Tobias ceaselessly, putting forward a thousand questions and conjectures expressing unbounded astonishment and admiration.

At the many stopping-places of the awkward craft, negroes and Indians came down to trade or to receive merchandise intended for the plantations along the

route. These usually carried great bundles or large reed-baskets of blossoms, so that the deck of the flat-boat was soon carpeted like a royal barge.

Joyce sat at the forward end,—that which would have been the prow had there been a prow to the vessel,—and dreamily watched the tardy but unwearied current bear the boat onward.

Slow-moving, mysterious, impenetrable, irresistible, it seemed to her like fate. She began to realize that we do not consciously choose our lives, but that they are an outgrowth of ourselves; that the thistle may not elect to bear figs, nor the rose-tree to bring forth lilies. And through it all there grew upon her a horror of the big river, a nameless terror of its slow, insolent urgency. She felt that it was bearing her on to a passage of life for which she was not prepared. She knew that it was leaving behind and between her and all the happy, simple past, a weltering waste which she could never recross.

The long voyage gave much time for thought, but Joyce could not think; she could only muse and dream and wonder. A fat little Creole on the boat—he scarcely reached her shoulder, and she was serenely unconscious of his very existence—brought out his guitar and sang many exceedingly amorous French songs for her behoof, all supported by a battery of killing glances, with windy sighs for buglers.

The twanging of the guitar formed a background for her thoughts. These were often of Jessop, but oftener of the new life to which she was going. Jessop had left Natchez before themselves. He was bound —or so they understood—for New York, where he had relatives, and he would return to meet them at Natchez in the summer.

Joy wondered idly if he would write to her, and, if so, whether his letters would be at all like that first

one, and if, amid all her novel surroundings, she should find herself so changed that they would no longer affect her as had that first love-letter.

She marveled a little that there had been, in the course of Jessop's passionate farewell, nothing said of writing. He had exacted what seemed to her the quite unnecessary assurance that she would never forget him, that she would not learn to love another; but he had neither asked her to write nor promised that he himself would do so.

At last the slow, silent, monotonous voyage was nearing its end. Hour by hour the river widened. Back from its brown, dull, drifting flood swept the low marshes, disked with stagnant pools of overflow, set with fresh green grasses. Reeds swayed to the murky current. Cranes and curious waterfowl stood or floated near the bank, while numberless birds fluttered about on light wings, dipping to the glassy tide in the exuberant joyousness of living—all accorded with the clamoring pulse of early springtime in this land of warmth and light.

On the eastern bank lay that city which to both Father Tobias and Joyce had been a sort of dream city, full of the mystery of the unknown, rich in the charm of something wholly different from all their even lives had hitherto held.

The bare, yellow shore, topped by a few shanties—Joyce would have named them cabins—and a small crowd of loafing idlers, who watched with lazy curiosity the passengers unload from the rude flat-boat—it was a very different picture from the bright, gay, busy place of her imagination.

It was noon of a Sabbath day. The deck-hands, if one may use this term in speaking of a craft which was all deck, dumped our travelers' modest luggage on the levee; the two wayfarers stood beside it, bewildered.

There was no crowd of vociferous hackmen to scramble for them or the luggage; but presently a gigantic negro in white cottonade very much soiled and mud-bespattered, with a great whip coiled around his arm, sauntered past and asked in strange patois if they desired a dray. They replied that they did; the trunks were lifted upon the small, unsteady vehicle, the address given to the driver, the mule—sleepy and cynical, as everything else appeared to Joyce in this unsatisfactory realization of her dreams—was induced to move, and, the driver running beside and encouraging the animal, and the travelers following at a breathless pace, that they might keep their property in view, the caravan started for Royal Street.

'Sieur Henri Valentine's mansion, a fine brick structure, was built eight years before Joy's memorable visit and two years after the great fire of 1778. Stuccoed and painted white, to Joy's wondering eyes it was a marble palace in a fairy-tale. The main entrance, on Royal Street, displayed a great arched doorway, deeply recessed, its wood- and iron-work painted white like the stucco. But here a lavish use of gold upon the carving added a sumptuous touch.

A negro in livery sat inside the recess, ready to open the door and announce the guests. As Joy and Father Tobias stepped from the glare of the street into the dusk and quiet of the entrance-hall, the girl's heart began to mount with pleasurable excitement.

When once he had ushered them in, the negro appeared to find them much in his way. All aristocratic New Orleans then, as now, slept through the hot hours of early afternoon. To disturb the siesta of his master and mistress or the young demoiselles was not to be thought of. Suddenly he had an inspiration. He would take these people—who did not look like any of the quality to whom he was used, and who were still

certainly not common people—up to the drawing-room and call Celeste. Celeste would know what to do; Celeste knew everything. Pursuant to this plan, they were led up the winding iron stair, with its beautiful foliated balustrading.

The immense drawing-rooms, answering for ball-rooms as well, were decorated and furnished in the French fashion. The panels, the fluted columns, the lofty ceilings, the profusion of gilding and mirrors, all this dazzled Joy's eyes, as well it might, for she was looking at an excellent example of Louis Quinze decorations and fittings, called then the finest in the city, and therefore the finest outside of France. She turned to her father confidently, to share her pleasure with him.

"It is very beautiful, my Joy," he said, a little wistfully; "almost as beautiful as the grove near our cabin when spring first sets the flowers to blossoming." And then they laughed a little, seeing that Father Tobias had arrayed the old, simple life against the glories of this new existence.

"They are both very beautiful," urged Joyce. "Cannot one love them both?"

A very light step—the whisper of a step—caused them to turn. A tall negress, slender, almost fragile-looking, with thin, patrician features, in spite of her brown skin, and with eyes like wells of black sunlight—if sunlight could ever be black—was approaching from the doorway. She was dressed entirely in white, her hair was covered with a great white *tignon*, shining hoops of gold were in her delicate ears. She was shod with thin and heelless slippers, and her slim, brown hands had the capable look which means executive ability. This was Celeste, the mainstay of the household, at times dictator and despot.

She raised those capable, slim hands now in astonish-

ment, and, speaking in French, cried: "It is indeed the brother of 'Sieur Valentine! How like—how very like to master! And this is the blooming daughter! The household sleeps, and Celeste will take you to your rooms, that you may repose yourselves after your weary journey."

All this, uttered softly in the clear, sliding Creole French, was but half intelligible to Joyce. Father Tobias understood enough of it to know that they were bidden to go somewhere for rest and refreshment. So they followed, Joy after Celeste and Father Tobias after a negro man summoned for the purpose, to what appeared to them very sumptuous rooms.

Celeste departed at once, leaving Joy alone in hers, and returned with a young negress whom she called Zette. This girl, she informed Joy, was to be her own maid, to attend on her in the daytime and to sleep across her door at night.

Left alone with Zette, Joy was a little puzzled as to what might come next. But Zette knew her duties too well to need prompting. Dropping at her demoiselle's feet, she began removing the shoes. Joy was helpless in the matter, as the girl only half understood the French in which she addressed her.

The shoes once off, she brought fresh water, basin, and towel, and laved Joy's feet, slipping them finally into a pair of gay silken *mules* procured for the purpose. This done, she loosened Joy's abundant hair from the pins which confined it, exclaiming as she did so over its beauty and length, and proceeded to brush it out with a long, rhythmic, practised stroke which was very soothing.

When its brightness was all braided up in two long plaits, the inexhaustible Zette presented a daintily embroidered camisole. "Would mam'selle sleep now? She must be very weary."

Father Tobias had never employed such disciplinary measures, but Joyce remembered somewhat humorously that Sister Loving Longanecker had been used, all through her timid childhood, to putting Patience to bed at noonday for the smallest offenses. The recollection inclined her to laugh, but, having no one to laugh with, she meekly donned the camisole and lay down upon the couch—to dream, if not to sleep. She was yet to learn that one of the strangest things in this strange, new life of hers was that she was expected to be always tired, always in need of rest.

Intent upon being obedient and not breaking in on the customs of the household, Joy lay so long staring at the blue, blue sky and the green tops of the magnolias against it, inhaling the mingled rose, magnolia fuscati and jasmine odors which wooed her through the window, that she was finally aware of a little soft sound, like a giggle behind her. She turned upon her couch, and saw two pairs of very bright eyes regarding her from the doorway.

When the two owners of these eyes saw that she was awake, they rushed in and attacked her, apparently from all sides. She was hugged, caressed, told that she was beautiful as a flower, smothered with fluttering scarfs and flying ringlets till she scarcely knew whether she was Joyce Valentine or no. When the riot settled down somewhat, she found two very slim, very dark, very pretty, eager, bright young girls sitting beside her on the couch.

"Sit thee up, dear, delightful, beautiful thing, and let us look at thee!" cried the elder and quieter, who had introduced herself as Cousin Madeleine. "Ausite, behold those lashes. Didst ever see any so long, so heart-breaking?"

Ausite, appealed to, pounced upon the astonished Joy and kissed the apostrophized eyelashes, first one eye

and then the other. "Methinks there never, never was anything so charming," she cried, and then, with a sudden spreading abroad of her pretty little hands and an indescribable widening of her clear, dark eyes: "There 's so-o-o much of her! She 's a banqueet of beautee."

Joyce did indeed look of heroic mold beside her slim, dark, restless cousins, whose lips and hands and eyes were never still. They caressed her, they chattered, till presently Madeleine arose, with a little shriek and an explosion of Creole French which included "Maman —*diner!*"

The absent Zette was hastily recalled, and, both girls assisting—or hindering—Joy's toilet was made. She was then conducted to Maman's room, to be presented before the afternoon meal.

Joy's one trunk had been brought up and unfastened by the servants. She had expected to purchase most of her wardrobe in New Orleans. Now, upon going to select something for wear in her uncle's house this first day, she found but one gown suited to the purpose, and that a white muslin—her best—bought after the trip to New Orleans was decided upon. It was made after the model of one of Wilful Guion's frocks, and, though short-waisted and scant of skirt, was not so much amiss. But there was no one other garment in the trunk in which Joy felt she could properly appear.

Joy found her uncle's wife, her new "tante," as she was bidden to call her, an enlarged edition of the daughters, but very fat and, in spite of her vivacity, very languid. She kissed Joy with the kindest affection, and looked her over, beaming with satisfaction.

"Why, 't is a young beauty Brother Toby hath brought me from the wilderness. And, oh, me!" with a little sigh, "beauties are such a responsibility." As the mother of sons, she was wary of beauties.

Joyce blushed rosily. "Indeed, madame—" "Ma tante," supplied Madame Valentine, promptly. "Indeed, ma tante," corrected Joyce, "I have ne'er been considered so fair. If I can but be good and please you thus, I shall be satisfied."

Madame Valentine's fine eyes interrogated the ceiling. "Listen to the young saint!" she cried. "Why do my girls never talk like that?"

But Ausite pouted. "Nobody looks for virtues in a pretty woman," she said. "The ugly ones have no choice but to behave themselves."

"You sinful, wicked girl," reproved Maman, with apparent severity. "You should say at least a dozen Paternosters for that, and mind you don't forget it when you go to confession. Such light speech is sin."

For the first time Joyce realized fully that these relatives of hers were Catholics, and understood what had set such a gulf between Father Tobias and his brother's family.

The dining-table looked to the inexperienced girl magnificent. The silver was massive, the china exquisite, and the service perfect; for Madame Valentine was, with all her languor, an exceptional housewife.

In the dining-room two more cousins were presented to Joyce. One of these was a tall young officer, Captain Luis Le Blanc Valentine, who drew his heels together, made her the most military of bows, and then bent and kissed her hand after the approved fashion of the times. The other was a boy of sixteen, so like his mother that the resemblance was almost comical. His short, arched upper lip showed the first darkening of a manly down; but in each round, olive cheek, smooth as a baby's, there was a deep dimple which played at hide and seek as he laughed or talked. Joy felt herself drawn to this boy at once, sweetly and tenderly. His very large, clear, dark eyes had a look as

though there were a lamp behind them—a spiritual light—and his white teeth were always flashing in smiles.

Joyce found her uncle to be a big, genial, material version of Father Tobias. Celeste was correct in her estimate of the resemblance between them. He took his young relative into a bearish embrace.

"God bless my soul, but you 're a beauty! Just what your mother was at your age," he cried, kissing her heartily on both cheeks, while the young captain looked enviously on. "Ah, Toby, Toby, she minds me of the milk-and-roses English lasses. Our dark beauties here will be quite outshone."

And the girl wondered to hear, for the fourth time since she entered that house, the question of beauty given such prominence. It was one which up to this time she had never debated, and the importance which it appeared to have in the estimation of her uncle's family quite astonished her. She considered seriously whether or no she were really beautiful, and if other people than these kind relatives of hers would find her so.

Father Toby was away from her, across quite a sea of linen and silver and flowers; but her native fineness prevented embarrassment, since she never thought at all of any special etiquette pertaining to table service. And contrasting her gentle, unworldly old father with her uncle, she felt no shame, but a distinct pride in his simple good breeding.

That first night, before Joy slept, madame came in to see that she had everything for her comfort. Father Tobias was going home on the following day, and Joyce handed the purse which contained all her money to Madame Valentine.

"I shall want a great many things, of course, which I never needed at home," she began frankly. "Indeed,

tante, I have but the one frock which is fitting for my wear here. 'T were better you bought for me—or tell me what to buy—for I see I know scarce anything about it all."

Madame Valentine took the purse, kissed her niece, and assured her that the wardrobe would all be provided in good time. "When a demoiselle is as pretty as you are, ma petite," she said affectionately, "pretty things belong to her by right, and everybody sees that she gets them. My naughty Luis, who is a great flirt and hath the name of breaking more hearts than any gallant in town—the wicked fellow!—is already sighing for you and dying for you. But I have warned him that you are not a frivolous girl, such as those to whom he is used, but a very earnest young saint, and that he must let you alone."

"I thought my Cousin Luis very handsome," returned Joy, proffering the commendation so current in this household. "All of my cousins are handsome, but the youngest one, Neville, pleased me, I believe, most of any."

"Ah," smiled Madame Valentine, with evident satisfaction, "I call Neville the baby because he is the last boy out of the nursery, and he is a dear child."

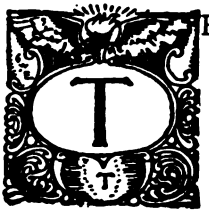
"Have you other children,, tante?" asked Joy, in wonderment. The house was so large, the company so numerous, and servants so swarmed everywhere that she had failed to gather any hint of more family than appeared at dinner.

"Any more children?" cried Madame Valentine, with a little shriek, and she added, with her comfortable laugh: "Loads of them, sweetheart. I know not how many, because we count them only on high days and holidays, or when there is a family fête."

When Joyce laid her head on her pillow it was to dream not of Jessop nor even of her new cousins, but

of sundry frills and frivols which she much desired to have, that she might appear like other young maids. And her last waking thought was in regard to that curious valuation which her new relatives seemed to set upon beauty.

CHAPTER XVIII



HE Convent of the Three Sorrows was a small, shabby building, on one of the less desirable streets of New Orleans. The sisterhood was vowed to poverty, and a little hospital, supported by voluntary contributions, gave occupation to the nuns.

In the fall of 1798 came to this humble convent a rather curious consignment, in the person of a small black girl, perhaps ten years of age, clad in a costly and elegant costume many sizes too large for her, the great sleeves pinned up on her thin, little arms, the multitudinously flounced skirt festooned to escape the floor. Also there was a personal attendant, a gigantic negress called Zoombi, who wore great barbaric crescents of gold in her ears and a most imposing *tignon* on the top of her tall head.

This child was the daughter of a king and hight the Princess Lalla.

Her father was one of those who from time to time have seized and held brief control of a West Indian island. And this man, when he thought his hold was sufficiently secure to venture upon displaying the negro's love of pomp and title, proclaimed himself king, and ruled his sorry little kingdom with a strong and bloody hand.

This, his only child, was sent to New Orleans to be educated for those dignities and duties which he in-

tended should be presently hers. He was making a barbarian's overtures to England. His daughter had been taught good English, she spoke French quite as well, and Spanish was mainly the language of the island. With the distrust and suspiciousness of an ignorant half-savage, the man desired to have about him an interpreter of his own blood.

Despite the smallness and poverty of his kingdom, there was plenty of money to spend for this purpose. His emissary was an American-born mulatto who, finding it impossible to place a negress—even though a princess—in any school attended by white children, picked out an obscure convent whose nuns were nursing sisters, not teachers.

After much persuasion, these sisters agreed to permit Broutin, as the mulatto styled himself, to fit up in the convent a suite of rooms, which he furnished and decorated in a most flamboyant style.

A great price was paid for the maintenance and tuition of the princess, and there were many stipulations, not only in regard to the royal well-being, but to the observation of that state and etiquette which befitted her rank.

Zoombi was the tiring-woman. It was her humble office, and one which she performed to the satisfaction of both parties, to endue the royal person with the astonishing accoutrement of Lal's own choosing.

The great, gaunt, savage-looking creature waited upon her small charge hand and foot, fanned her with a fan of shining peacock feathers, carried about a rug and footstool, stood always behind her chair when she sat, and walked a pace or two behind her when she walked.

Sister Angelina, who was held to be prodigiously learned, was the royal instructor, and she taught this most profitable pupil conscientiously.

On a Saturday the attendant was allowed, if the princess desired, to conduct her royal charge into the city. If the day were warm, the big negress always carried a broad, red umbrella over her mistress, and though it was very difficult to do this and continue to walk behind her highness, Zoombi's diligent humility managed to compass it.

The little black royalty, in her resplendent attire, her tall, grim-visaged servitor clad in speckless white cottonade, the turban which topped her head a thing to muse upon—it was a procession which might have marched, complete, from between the covers of some old Eastern volume, and the quaint humor of its incongruity was not lost upon the laughter-loving Creoles.

New Orleans was even then a considerable city, and yet the peculiarities of its arrangement, still so marked among the towns of this country, made it appear less of a city than it really was.

The houses, showing from the street only low, pink-plastered façades, proved—the portal once passed, or even the courtyard entered—to be homes of a beauty and elegance which in many cases approached magnificence. Built around courts, in which were fountains and a profusion of flowers, native and exotic, were balconies covered with monster vines of blooming roses brought from France. These homes were unique in America, and, indeed, in beauty and charm, were not elsewhere surpassed.

Ten years before, in 1788, the core of the city was bitten out by a great fire, which left a bare, blackened waste for a heart-broken populace to rebuild. This disaster proved, however, a disguised blessing to the town. The buildings destroyed were largely one-story wooden structures, and most of the magnificence of the New Orleans of a hundred years ago—which is the

French quarter of the modern city—dates from the rebuilding of this burned district.

The little wooden structures were succeeded by edifices of brick, stuccoed. Spanish models were generally followed—the city, be it remembered, was still under Spanish sway—and there prevailed in the architecture an amplitude and elegance which have scarce been exceeded since.

The destroyed public buildings were renewed by Don Andreas Almonester and Alferez Real. At this time was built the old cathedral still called for the don, its giver. Under its altar his dust is laid, and there each day at vespers a prayer is still said for the repose of his soul.

The stores of the day were small and unpretentious. But in these little shops were vended, at fat prices never questioned, the most magnificent fabrics, the costliest silks, laces, tissues, shell, and ivories that Paris could supply. It was a rich field, and from their expeditions the princess and her retainer brought back wonderful spoil.

Lalla always bought till the big, purple-silk, bead-fringed money-pouch, which hung ever at Zoombi's girdle, was limp and empty. Her purchases gave notice of a truly royal disregard for the humble detail of mere fitness. The sovereign caprice lit, not improbably, upon a gorgeous tobacco-pouch, a gentleman's lace cravat, a tinseled bolero intended for the wear of some Spanish caballero. And she wore her inappropriate purchases with a most appropriate gravity and decorum.

The Princess Lal's first school term was drawing toward its close. With the pride of voluntary diligence and that silent singleness of purpose which the child showed in the conduct of her affairs, she had applied herself to learn. And always, between the les-

son hours, she studied in significant silence the little migratory tribes which ran and laughed and played, in vulgar, unfettered, irresponsible bliss, in the street before the convent, reflecting austerely that they were born to be common people, subjects, and she a queen ruler over such.

Bred in a community where a white face was rare, familiar with the arrogant display of new-gotten power, the question of race, of color, did not then present itself to Lalla, or, if considered at all, did not assume that ultimate importance which, as she was later to learn, attached to it. Looking upon these children, she told herself that, so high as her lot was above theirs, just so far must she excel them in every way.

Unlike most negroes, she had an aptitude for learning which felt no hardship in study. Instead, it supplied companionship and solace to this self-imposed loneliness. But as the season advanced, and birds, trees, and flowers all brought more and more to her memory the warm, laughing, joyful summer of her tropical home, nobody knew how heavy Lal's heart was with that passionate homesickness which spring always brings to the exile.

In the open door of the refectory, two of the hooded sisters were shelling peas. Lessons were over. It was a golden afternoon. The magnolias loaded every gust with flattering sweetness. In the garden, Lal sat in solitary state, Zoombi, the great peacock-feather fan dropped from her hand, asleep behind her.

In the warm, soft, drowsy stillness, the cords of this lonely young potentate's stern resolution relaxed. An emissary from the free and fearless Bedouins infesting the banquette outside was struck rigid with amazement upon being received with something suspiciously akin to relief and eagerness, and sent back with a message which bade the whole tribe to enter.

The lapse was sudden and complete. This thing also Lal did energetically. The pied assembly, black, white, and yellow, was shrieking in mid-ecstasy of a strenuous and recondite game of tag, when down the long corridor came the Mother Superior, with a very finely dressed and highly rouged dame beside her. At the door she met a mounted post with a packet of letters.

The lady who accompanied Mother Clemence was known among her associates simply as "Madame." Her house on Canal Street, demure of exterior, gorgeous within, was much frequented by the dandies of the town. But it was especially the resort of gentlemen adventurers, soldiers of fortune, all sorts of loose fish which swam the cosmopolitan tide that rose upon those coasts.

Three years before, Madame, deserted by her servants, had been nursed through the yellow fever by the sisters of the Three Sorrows. Her gratitude took the form of an annual visit and gift to the convent. This pilgrimage was perhaps as near a religious observance as Madame's life ever approached.

Mother Clemence called one of the sisters, and bade her show Madame through the hospital, while she herself should read the letters brought by the post.

Madame's interest in the improvements which her last gift had enabled the sisters to make, as shown to her in detail by the meek nun, was but languid. "Yes, yes," she cried, "the cots will, perchance, be better that way; but methinks they are most horrible, anyhow. Being ill is sure a sin. People should be soundly flogged for daring to."

"O Madame, our poor patients!" protested the nun.

But Madame looked about upon the ailing creatures with her hard, bright smile. "A good trouncing would cure most of 'em, I warrant me," she declared, and

swept on down the stairway, the dismayed nun trotting after her.

When the sister reached the courtyard, Madame was standing near Lalla, and the last heel of the last fleeing Bedouin was vanishing through the gateway.

"Who is that little monkey?" the woman asked, pointing with her cane to Lalla. And in a respectful undertone the child's title and dignities were recited to her.

" 'Od's life, a princess!" she sneered. "What is 't ye tell me the father pays for her keep and schooling here?"

The sister did not know, but mentioned a sum which she thought might be near the figure. "La!" screamed Madame, " 't is revenue enough to keep up two convents—and you ding-donging at the public for gifts! Well, 'the churches and hell are never filled,' as the saying goes."

The horrified nun strove to draw her away from the children, but Madame was interested in the princess, and refused bluntly to go. "How many wives hath your father?" she asked, touching the child on the shoulder.

Lalla arose with dignity, and was about to depart without speaking. "Sulky imp!" commented Madame. "Make her answer, Sister Mary Paul."

"Your pardon, Madame; I cannot force her to reply," deprecated the sister, with lowered eyes. " 'T is not permitted that any save Sister Angelina, her teacher, take authority with her. I can myself tell you that her father hath no wife. He is widowed, and Lalla is his only child."

Madame looked curiously at the small, black face, turned up to hers, full of defiant dislike. "Humph!" she muttered, "a nigger brat—a piccaninny—to finger all that chink! And later—to be—" Her eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "What doth the girl like?" she

asked abruptly, turning to the nun. "Sugar-plums? Is she never friendly?"

"She hath all that she desires. And 't is not permitted," answered the nun, returning to her formula, "that she make friends or visit in the city."

She had all that she desired! Who in the grown-up world about them ever fathoms the heart of a child? Poor Lalla was one bundle of ignorant, uncontrolled, battling desires.

Madame, who seemed to have some vague plan concerning her, turned and spoke with some attempt at kindness to the child, questioning at random, but with watchful eyes, of her studies and of her life here and at home on the island.

Lalla, her chin held high, answered in haughty monosyllables.

As they talked, Mother Clemence came down the stair from the upper gallery, bearing a very troubled countenance. She listened a moment to Madame's conciliatory speeches, then, drawing nearer to Lalla, "My poor child, I have terrible news for you," she said.

"My father!" cried Lalla, instantly. "They have killed him?"

The mother silently nodded.

Lalla's father was dead; that was the news the letters had brought—stabbed by one of his own household. The pretender who had procured his death now occupied the throne—that seat so insecure, so uncomfortable, which cost many lives to reach and more to hold. To insure his own dynasty, the new king—or president, as he at first called himself—was now, so ran the letter, day by day hastily trying, condemning, and executing the old king's friends and followers.

The whole fabric of Lalla's life had fallen at a stroke, and left her desolate. She stood before the Mother Superior, clutching and unclutching her thin,

little black hands. "Will nobody come for me?" she choked.

"No; there is none left now to send for you, my child. You must e'en bide here."

"And not be a princess any more? Be a negress—a common negress? Be a servant?" her voice rising on each broken ejaculation, until she screamed in terror: "Ai, ai! *Will I be a servant?*"

The nun, habituated to the sight of suffering through the experiences of her daily life, and by birth and education indifferent to all sufferings of Lalla's race, was touched by the untempered despair of one so young.

But Madame watched with eager, enjoying curiosity while Lalla stormed and raged, then wept forlornly. At the last she cried: "Be quiet! I would speak to Mother Clemence."

She pointed with her cane toward Zoombi, who was patiently trying to set to rights her princess's disarranged attire, and said sharply:

"Look you, this woman appears a stout, able negress. I will take her into my service, and pay you a small wage. 'T will help make up to you for the keep of the brat." And once more, as though to a little howling dog or cat, she cried, "Be quiet!" and added, "Faith, the little devil screams like a macaw!"

But Lalla had heard only Madame's proposal to take Zoombi, and she wailed:

"If you send Zoombi away—O Mother Clemence! You will not send her away! Who would dress me, then—and clean my shoes—and wash me—and bring my breakfast? Oh, who will talk to me of home?"

"Child," came the reply, in the nun's voice of trained repression, "we are all poor. We have made ourselves as beggars, for the love of the blessed Lord. None here can leave her holy labors to do those offices. And for Zoombi, she must now earn her bread—perchance

your own as well." Mother Clemence cast down her eyes and stood passive.

Madame glanced from Lalla's little, black face to the nun's mask-like countenance. She stepped boldly up to the child, and again cried: "Why, look you! I see here two things which I can use, instead of one. My macaw—this brat screams just like it—died yesterday; both my monkeys are in a consumption; methinks her majesty might slip into their places amazing well. Why not let me take both negresses?"

"The princess—" began Mother Clemence.

"Nay, nay," interrupted Madame, "the child need work but little, and she shall not be beaten. I cannot promise quite royal state, but 't will be food and shelter, and methinks the girl might be useful to me."

Mother Clemence debated with herself a moment. "I will speak to Father Bernard of the matter," she said finally. "We will see—we will see. If no arrangement may be made here, perhaps—perhaps, my daughter."

And she continued, as she walked away with Madame: "Remember this poor creature hath a soul to be saved, even as you or I."

Madame laughed lightly. "In which she differs, I judge you would fain say to me, from my macaw and my monkeys. Well, then, Mother Clemence, I will lay it to heart that she hath a soul to be saved—or to be damned; and she may be either, for all I care," she added under her breath, as she gathered up her silken draperies and sailed away to her waiting volante.

CHAPTER XIX

T was a long room with lofty, painted ceiling, and handsomely but oddly furnished. There were pictures on the walls—excellent pictures, but all of one type. Down the center of the apartment stood tables, and these tables were covered with green cloth. There was something overdone in the magnificence of the place. A little too much gilding, ornaments too many, draperies too voluminous, proclaimed the public room and not the home.

This was what Madame pleased to call her drawing-room. To-night it was full of guests sitting at the long tables, and these guests were all men. Madame's drawing-room was, in short, the salon of one of the most noted gambling resorts in the New Orleans of that date.

The air was a glare of brightness, and almost intolerably warm from the flame of multitudinous candles. An orchestra, somewhere out of sight, played dance music. Madame, magnificently dressed, received her guests near the doorway, or passed from table to table, with here and there a familiar word, a nod or a smile to some special friend.

At Madame's elbow, clad in a quiet suit of puce silk, yet with speckless ruffles of fine lace, and a diamond like a great tear shining in his shirt frill, stood Jessop.

"Not playing, Jessop?" Madame inquired. "You used not to be shy of it. Have you turned Methody?"

Jessop flushed uneasily. "Perhaps I have turned honest man, Madame," he retorted.

" 'Once a gambler, always a gambler,' " quoted Madame, sententiously. "Best sit thee down and have it out. 'T is bound to come sooner or later."

Jessop glanced moodily toward the table, as though he half considered the advisability of accepting the woman's counsel.

"Well met, Major Jessop!" cried a familiar voice from the doorway, and Colonel Aaron Burr came forward with outstretched hand.

Jessop's first impulse was, ignoring the hand, to tax Burr to his face with his recent perfidy in leaving his poor tools of the abortive Mississippi plot to their fate. But there was his own coat, morally speaking, in tatters, and he felt that a certain laxness as to such rents in the garments of others not only became him, but was in some sort an apology for his own shortcomings. His greeting to Colonel Burr could not, however, have been called warm. The two men strolled the length of the room together, remarking the players and chatting of indifferent matters.

As they turned again toward the entrance where Madame stood, "I presume you have been meeting Mistress Joyce Valentine here," Burr remarked.

"Why, no," returned Jessop; "I came but the day before yesterday. I knew Mistress Valentine was in New Orleans, but I have not called."

"Faith," laughed Burr, "I do think 't is the only young gallant in town who hath not done so."

"Is Mistress Joyce, then, so much a belle?" inquired Jessop, with uneasy interest.

"So much a belle, is it?" repeated Burr. "I give you my word that our little Natchez Methody is turning

the heads of all the men in town. They serenade her three deep, so that her uncle, at whose house she lies, hath thought, I am told, of asking protection from the military. And whenever she goes abroad, 't is like an Easter procession in which all the novices are young beaux."

To Jessop this information was both pleasing and unwelcome. He had his own reasons for not desiring to meet Joyce during her stay in New Orleans, and yet he hoped that he might see her.

When a drunkard is troubled the drink reaches for him, and in anxiety the gambler reaches for his cards. Considering thus, it may not seem so strange that, disquieted by this news, Jessop, almost before he knew it, was sitting at one of the little tables, with the old, familiar bits of pasteboard in his hand.

Burr, whose visit was mainly one of curiosity, seated himself finally upon one of the sofas. The music—sad, as dance music is always sad—wailed and sobbed through the rooms. The light swish of the pasteboards, the hum of subdued conversation, an oath pronounced now and then with a little more vivacity than the words which preceded or followed it—these made up the sounds in Madame's drawing-room.

Through the window came the scent of the ever-present orange blossoms. All about the apartment were tall china vases carrying great pyramids of the waxen bloom; on tiny stands the golden globes of the fruit itself.

A tall, gray-haired old gentleman, in a plum-colored suit, pushed back from one of the tables near Burr, and, leaving it, seated himself beside the colonel on the sofa, after first courteously asking his permission to do so.

Burr remarked that the scene before them was an interesting one. "It is so to me still," confirmed the

old gentleman, "though I have been coming here for my evening game these fifteen years. In fact, I have been coming here for my evening game ever since Juan Rubio launched her. Madame was a young woman then—and pretty. Perchance you may remember Rubio was hung eventually, and Madame draped the place in black. 'T was curious playing cards in among the crape, but then Madame is curious. She would never go by Rubio's name after he was hung. 'T was piracy, you know. That 's what they made it, though, to the best of my knowledge and belief, 't was no more than a bit of smuggling."

"Madame Rubio," murmured Burr. "And what name does she bear now? I find the tradesmen and the drivers of volantes and caleches all know her simply as Madame."

"'Od's life!" ejaculated the elder man, "I could not tell you, old friend as I am. I think she changes her names with her frocks. A year or so gone, 't was Madame Jessop. She was plucking a young fool of an Englishman then—Mountfalcon a'Jessop, I think he called himself."

"Is that the man?" asked Burr, quietly, glancing to where Jessop sat intent upon his game.

The old gentleman put up his glass and looked. "Why, so 't is," he agreed. "The fellow hath come back. He left here mightily frayed at the seams. He appears to be again in fortune. Well, if so, Madame will find him worth the plucking once more," and the old gentleman chuckled.

The sofas about the room were now well filled with spectators. A genial buzz of conversation accompanied the serving of fruits and wines. Suddenly the music ceased, a bell was rung, a man and a woman in Spanish costume mounted a raised platform at one end of the room, whereupon the music recom-

menced, but in a new measure, and a Spanish dance was given.

At its close the old gentleman yawned slightly. "Madame—Jessop, as I suppose I must now begin to call her again—is famous for getting the most curious performers to amuse her audiences. Sometimes she goes too far. Five years agone she had in a man with performing leopards; one of them got loose and clawed a slave, I think, to death. She has learned to be more prudent nowadays."

A singer had followed the dancers, and now a juggler was tossing aloft little balls, drawing rabbits from his hat, and performing the usual repertoire of tricks.

Burr's attention came back to Jessop; he fancied the man was playing high—and losing. When his eyes were recalled to the stage he saw a giant negress, all in white, holding aloft a crimson, gold-fringed umbrella. Beneath this canopy stood the most absurd small figure that could be imagined. It was a child, intensely black, very solemn. A small gilt crown was on her woolly head. She was tricked out in a gown of purple velvet, an ermine stole about her neck. As he looked with some surprise at this grotesque figure, the child began reciting, with considerable spirit and ability, a queen's soliloquy from one of the plays of an old French dramatist.

The effect of the grandiose words, so tragically uttered by this quaint little piccaninny, was inexpressibly incongruous. At a table nearest the platform some men looked up from their game and began to laugh.

The child instantly halted and glared at them. The laugh grew louder. Her little face convulsed with rage. Her eyes rolled whitely. "I will not say it—I will not!" she screamed. "I will not stand here to be mocked!" She stamped her foot, and, tearing the tinsel crown from her head, trampled it in a transport of

rage. "Nobody can make me say it," she cried. "I am a queen, my father is a king, and he will have every one of your silly heads cut off!"

At this a great roar of laughter arose. And when the poor Princess Lal, kicking and screaming, was borne off by Zoombi, it was voted quite the most amusing performance of the evening.

As Colonel Burr took his departure, he paused beside the table at which Jessop was playing. "What luck, major?" he asked gaily.

"The devil's own," Jessop answered savagely.

"Ah, well," smiled Burr, "you know the proverb, major, 'lucky in love, unlucky at cards.' That man who hath won the heart of sweet Mistress Joyce Valentine needs not luck at cards."

At mention of Joy's name, Jessop's face went white. "How knew you of that?" he gasped hoarsely, half rising. His hand groped for the hilt of his sword. "Who told you of it, and how dare you come here with your damned meddling tongue to prate of it?"

"Softly, softly," counseled Burr. "Fair and softly, major. I said naught but what all the world knows." And to himself he murmured, as he went out: "Soho! The prodigal weds the parson's daughter, after all. And a pernicious fellow it is—one into whose wheel I would fain thrust a spoke."

It was broad daylight before Madame's drawing-room was cleared of its guests. When they were all gone, Jessop, who had lingered to the last, turned to the woman and said: "Why the devil did you send me that money? 'T is gone. Meseems 't is like changing coins from one pocket to another for you to give it me and then win it back over the cloth here."

Madame smiled an inscrutable smile. "I wearied for you," she declared, "ere you were a month gone. And when your letter came, desiring the clothes, I

sent first them, and, seeing that did not recall you, the money after. 'T was like rolling pennies downhill after a lost coin; but, since it brought you back, I am right glad I ventured it."

"Stuff and nonsense!" broke in Jessop. "You never cared one groat for me. I know right well, Madame, that when you spend money it is to get money; but how you shall come by any from such an empty purse as I, 't is a riddle to me."

He leaned back in his chair and looked at her with narrowed, speculative eyes, as she sat across from him. Was it possible she had heard of his intended marriage with Joy, and was jealous thereat? Vanity favored this conclusion, but Jessop's vanity had learned hard lessons so far as Madame was concerned.

Daylight in a room which has contained a considerable party overnight always brings cynical revelations. Refuse bits of paper, torn playing-cards, scraps of orange-peel, and the ash of many cigarettes strewed table and floor in Madame's drawing-room.

The servants had been sent away, that she might have her talk with Jessop uninterrupted. Glasses empty and half filled encumbered the tables. Despite the freshness of the morning, there was a stale air in the room, a fagged, haggard look over everything and upon the faces of the two who sat talking. Madame's rouge stood out startlingly on her pale cheeks, but she bore Jessop's scrutiny with her usual impassive calm.

"If my damned vanity had not led me to ask for those clothes, I was quit of you," he growled.

"Who is this woman?" asked Madame, hardily.

"*Cherchez la femme*," returned Jessop, in his most trifling and cynical manner. "You believe in the saying, meseems."

"For what else should you want evening clothes?"

inquired Madame. "Is 't a maid? Hath she money? Are you thinking to wed, Jessop?"

"'T is a maid, she hath not money, and I am even thinking of breaking incontinently into the holy estate of matrimony," answered Jessop, with mounting gaiety.

"You 'd never be such a fool!" exclaimed Madame. "Money you needs must have; women come for the asking."

"Prate not to me of being a fool, my mentor; you have not seen Joyce Valentine." With the uttering of Joy's name here in this place, the realization of who it was to whom he was dilating upon her charms, there came a sudden tightness in Jessop's throat. He rose with a gesture of loathing, and stood looking the woman over somberly. Under that naked distaste she shrank a trifle. At last he broke out: "Body o' God, Madame, what a hound you make of me!"

"I?" she queried. "Did I corrupt the immaculate Mountfalcon a'Jessop? Sad—is 't not?—that the wicked women will not let these pious youths alone, but must still come tempting them."

"'T is no use bandying words," rejoined Jessop, fiercely, "whether you, or life, or circumstances have made a villain of me, methinks my father's son was born for better things."

"La, la," exclaimed Madame, "fine words, my Jessop! The coat upon your back is bought with my money, you have just lost the last penny I gave you across the table, and your tongue is even now tickling to ask me for more."

Jessop looked down at the woman furiously. Every word she uttered was true, even to the last—that he needed money, and knew not where else to come by it.

Madame had been figuring upon some little tablets drawn from her girdle. Now she reached across, and

laid them on the table before him. There, set down with his name and the date, was every sum of money she had given him after his own fortune went across her gaming-tables. She pointed to the reckoning at the bottom.

"A pretty little total, my friend," she said dryly. "A man who would be free must pay his score. Have ye wherewith to pay? I doubt it." Then, with a sudden change of tone, as her companion dropped into his chair and hid his shamed face among the scattered cards upon the table: "Ah, Jessop, Jessop, you are but a boy, after all. I am not angry with you. I cannot be angry with you. See, here, I give it freely, just as I give you my love always." She pushed a pile of coins over against his hand. Jessop, without raising his head, shrunk as though their touch had burned him.

Madame was a wise woman. She made no further tender of herself or her affections, but, bending, placed a hand upon his hair and whispered softly: "Poor boy! In faith, I 'm sorry; but I love you too well to give you up without a struggle." And, moving noiselessly away, she left him, the untouched money on the table beside him.

After a little, Jessop felt a timid touch upon his knee. "Can't you let me alone, damn you?" he groaned, without looking up.

"Lalla thought you were dead," said a very small, meek voice. "Lalla found a dead man here one morning, but there was a hole in his head, and blood everywhere. It spoiled the carpet, and Madame was angry." All this in good French, not the clipped Creole French.

Jessop raised his haggard face, ashen under the cold search of the early day, and looked. It was the small, black girl who had recited the Queen's Soliloquy. She was dressed now in the garb which the other servants

wore. "Poor man, has the white devil ordered you whipped?" she asked.

"Yes," said Jessop, under his breath, and speaking not to the wondering child, but to himself, "she has ordered me whipped by all the furies of hell."

"Prithee, let us go and kill her," was the child's startling proposition. "Zoombi is afraid; Zoombi is a great big coward."

Jessop rose up, and, forgetting the child, stood staring at the money. He knew that he would eventually take it; he felt to the full the shame of doing so. He realized that if he could but wait, money would come to him from England. But did a gambler ever wait?

His hand stole toward the pieces. When funds came from his father he would repay it. But he must have money now. Beaten back into the old slough of degradation, he longed inexpressibly for sight of Joy, the one creature who had ever helped him at his worst to attain his better self. To be able to see her, he must have money. It was a risk, of course, to see her at all, but it was a risk he must run.

He shoved the coins carelessly into the pocket of his coat, then became again aware of the little creature standing beside him, staring at him solemnly. "Dost want some of it?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes," returned Lalla. "Had we money, Zoombi and I could get away from the white devil."

Jessop laughed discordantly as he drew out a coin and flung it to her. "Pardie, I shall use it to get away from the white devil, too!" he said.

"I pray you, help me to kill her," urged Lalla. "I would rather kill her than run away from her. Why do you run away?" she added. "You have a sword. Had I a sword, none should drive me."

Again the mirthless laugh came to Jessop's lips.

"Faith," he said, "even the throneless queen knows me for a renegade."

The two exiles from high position stood measuring and estimating each other: one a child—a woman child —small, black, ignorant, with the high heart and courage of a warrior; the other of earth's dominant race, a man, trained to arms, whose soul was unstable as tide-water.

Lalla sighed impatiently. "Thank you for the money," she said. She was learning humility and courtesy in a hard school. "But I wish you were a man like my father, and would go with me and help me to kill her."

CHAPTER XX

HE abundant finery Madame Ausite provided for Joyce—all, as she asserted, purchased with the contents of the small purse, which must have rivaled that of Fortunatus—was monstrously becoming to the stately young beauty.

When Joyce told her aunt that she thought there could never have been such a shopper before, and exclaimed over the quantity and elegance of her purchases, good Madame Valentine merely laughed and, with a hearty kiss, declared that naught could be too fine for such a pretty chick as her sweet niece. The girl was becoming warmly attached to her new relatives, but among them she had her favorites. Her cousin Madeleine she deemed the most beautiful girl she had ever seen. Not even Wilful, so famous far and near for charm and loveliness, could equal her, Joyce decided.

And still they talked of beauty, and of Joy's beauty, until she went fairly dizzy with the adulation and the pride of it all. The soldier cousin showed great eagerness to be foremost among her flatterers, but she minded well all that Tante Ausite had said to her of Captain Luis and his fancy for flirtation. His ardor mounting with opposition, Luis swore he loved her, and her alone of all the world, denied that he had ever flirted or could flirt with any, and wept great tears or

disappointment—not of love, as Joyce believed—over her coldness.

It seemed to Joy that these days in her uncle's house were fuller of pleasure than the days at home had ever been of work. Sometimes she thought, with a little dismay, that the work had been easier, for her at least, than all this junketing. Her direct mind, trained to the simple "yea" and "nay" of a primitive society, was continually disquieted to search the real meaning of these people who talked so much hyperbole, who ogled and simpered or made great eyes over nothing at all.

When thoughts like these came to her, Joy taxed herself with treachery because she, even as they, said one thing and felt another. The fear which haunted her most was that she was really of a vacillating mind and unstable in purpose. She reproached herself that she had grown weary of the simplicity of her home, had given up that first aim of her life to preach the Word, and come here to seek she knew not what. Now, was she tired of this also in a few weeks, and longing for yet another change? She knew there was no desire to go back to the old cabin and the old life, and sighed over herself as a hopeless problem.

Luis, not content with sending Joy flowers and casting languishing glances at her whenever she was visible, planned continually new festivities of which she should be the center. These plans were for the most part promptly dismissed by his mother, but at last one of them found favor in her eyes. It was to be a picnic on Lake Pontchartrain upon his approaching birthday, and he had arranged it down to the smallest detail before he notified the ladies of his family.

Well, that, maman allowed, might not be so bad, after all. Indeed, so well impressed was Madame Valentine with the picnic plan that she even deigned to give aid in the preparations. Her niece was permitted

to assist, by her presence, at some of the more recondite of these arrangings. In the course of this work Joyce learned much of the mechanism of a large *ménage*, and she came to regard her aunt as a marvel of housewifely skill and executive ability. Every servant in the establishment had his or her duties accurately defined and rigorously required; with the same exactness were privileges and rewards bestowed and penalties imposed.

The household was so large and so composite that Joyce never wholly understood who were permanent inmates and who merely visitors like herself. The relationships among these various collateral branches of the family, and between them and the Valentines, was an endless source of puzzlement to her.

These voluble, volatile French people at once extended their circle to embrace her, and she became upon their Gallic tongues "Cousin Joyous," a version of her stern and simple name which was typical of their disposition to brighten and soften everything as it passed them.

The day preceding the picnic fête, Joy was allowed to go with Celeste on her regular early morning marketing trip. Zette was in attendance upon her, and two negro men followed with baskets, to carry home the purchases. The freshness of the streets at that hour, the odor of the flowers from behind garden walls, the cries of the street venders, were all interesting to Joy. She noted with curiosity an entirely different world of people abroad at this hour from those she would see later.

There were portly matrons going to attend to their own marketing, some in their carriages, others afoot and followed by negroes. There were stately negresses like Celeste, who were apparently purchasing for wealthy families, as she was. But there were no demoiselles or young gallants.

Perilously near the curb at one of the street corners they passed a small, rickety stand, piled high with great, odorous bunches of violets, jasmine, and orange blossoms. Behind this stood a small, black girl. She attracted Joy's attention because, while the other flower-venders were voluble in crying their merchandise, running after the "pretty lady," even laying hands upon her in their effort to attract her attention and convince her that their wares were just what she needed, this child stood perfectly stolid. She looked neither to right nor to left, but stared straight before her with a desolate, introspective gaze, as though she were searching illimitable spaces for something lost.

Celeste chid and even cuffed the too pressing saleswomen; but this little graven image found even less favor in her eyes. She alluded to her in passing as a surly *mechante* who needed the whip.

While they were still in sight of the stand and its wooden proprietress, a caleche, dashing around the corner, overthrew the flimsy table, scattering bouquets far and wide, and passed, grazing the girl.

Joy turned back with quick sympathy. A shrieking crowd of black, white, and yellow street urchins ran out, and, scrambling and fighting, flung themselves upon the fallen blossoms.

The girl made no effort to check their onslaught nor recover her own, but stood, her small, black hands clenched by her sides, vainly endeavoring to suppress the sobs which shook her thin, little body.

"Were you hurt?" asked Joy, kindly, while Celeste directed one of the negroes to pick up the fragments of the stand and gather together such remnants of the stock as might remain.

There were only a few splintered boards left, and the bunches which could be recovered were so damaged as to be unsalable. "Will your mother punish

you?" inquired Joy of the little *marchande*, in the preoccupation of her sympathy speaking in English.

"I have no mother," came the answer, in the same language, and surprisingly clear and correct. "I sell flowers for a white woman down there," and she waved her hand toward Canal Street.

"Hear the impudent little baggage," commented Celeste. Then, to the child, "You should not call your mistress a woman."

"She is not my mistress," flashed the other, angrily. "I am not a slave—I am a king's daughter."

"Umph!" sniffed Celeste; "one of these African niggers. I 'm tired of their airs—me. I hope your mistress will beat you well. 'T will do you good. *Oui*, mamselle, 't is the only way to train such as these"—to Joyce, who interposed in the child's behalf.

"She will beat me," said the girl, stolidly, "but I care not for that. Sometime I shall kill her," she added, quite as though she were discussing any ordinary matter.

Joy was both repelled and interested. "Come, mamselle; methinks madame would not be pleased that you should stand talking here on the street corner." Then, seeing the unwilling look in Joy's eyes, Celeste turned to the child and added: "You may follow, an it please you to. There 's naught left here for you to look after, and my young lady seems to have taken a fancy to your ugly, black face."

One would not have supposed that the child heard, but that as they went on she followed them. Wherever they paused for Celeste to make purchases, Joy talked to the girl, thus hearing piecemeal the poor little Princess Lal's story.

It touched her more than another, because she felt that they were in a sense fellow-exiles. Her own exile was voluntary. She had left poverty and hardship,

she had come to ease and luxury; yet somewhere in her heart was that which answered to the homesick longing in this child's eyes.

Lalla spoke indifferently of Madame's cruelty, which was excessive. "But," said Celeste, who caught scraps of the conversation, "you are not a slave." Turning to Joyce, she added: "These free negroes have a hard time. 'T is better to have a kind master than to have no master."

"Would not the sisters take you back?" asked Joy.

"Nay," returned the Princess Lal, seriously. "I must kill the white devil first, and then Zoombi and I will go home. But," she added, as an after-thought, "methinks if I could never go home, and I had to be a slave, I should be glad to belong to thee. Thou 'rt like to the Holy Mother at home in my father's chapel. She hath such a face and such gilded hair."

"You should not say 'thee' to the demoiselle," reproved Celeste, frowningly.

A gigantic negress with a great tray of fruit conserves on her head checked the singsong chant in which she was setting forth the values of her wares, turned, and came toward them. " 'T is Zoombi," said Lalla, calmly. "Now will I make her get some money for me, and perchance I shall not be beaten."

Joy appealed to Celeste—she was out without money of her own—and Celeste unwillingly handed the child a coin. The addresses of the sisters and the mistress of the poor little princess were noted down, and the two blacks went their way.

When the marketing party arrived at home it was near ten o'clock, and Tante Sophie came slipping into Joy's room to ask if she did not wish to come up to the nurseries for the bath hour.

Deeply interested, Joy followed. Tante Sophie led her to a remote wing of the house in which she had

never been. Two great, airy rooms, with lofty ceilings, wide casements, and white walls, contained the younger children of the house of Valentine. There were perhaps seven of them, but since each little Valentine was attended by a nurse or two, and revolved about by a little dark satellite who had been given it as companion and plaything, they appeared to Joy bewilderingly numerous.

The advent of Tante Sophie with a stranger was greeted with shrieks of delight. Tubs had been brought in and set upon the bare, polished floor, and the nurses were busy removing dainty white garments from dimpled, rosy bodies.

Two or three naked, bright-eyed little Loves rushed forward and charged the intruders. They swarmed all over Tante Sophie, and, demanding Joy's name, were soon capering about and addressing her in every grade of infantile and Creole patois as "Cousin Joyous." The scene was pretty enough to have charmed any onlooker. The children, running and shouting, splashed the water and shook the bright drops from their curly heads, while the odor of orange-trees and an occasional stray petal or blossom wafted in through the high casements. The mockers were in the midst of their morning concert, and their rapturous trills mingled with the wee ones' bubbling mirth. The whole scene was tuned to a high pitch of sunlight and song. And in the midst glowed Joy, incarnate Youth, with a little court of laughing Loves.

Midway the revels, Tante Ausite's stately figure appeared. If Joy was a queen in her court, Tante was judge of the circuit. The judicial bench was, it appeared, a certain large carved chair reserved evidently for this one occupant. In it Madame Ausite seated herself, and received smilingly or frowningly, but with scrupulous attention to detail, all the nursery reports.

And here again Joy was impressed by this languid fine lady's thoroughness in the doing of her duty as she saw it. As Madame Haman was in a hurry, the children were slipped at once into their little chemises, and then began an inquisition into the mental, moral, and physical health of the entire brood. Even the wee toddlers were learning to dance, and must rehearse their baby accomplishments, while the catechism was not neglected. Through it all Joy noted the love and veneration with which Madame Valentine was treated by each of her children.

The nursery inspected, Tante, taking Joyce with her, proceeded to the weaving-room. This was a huge, well-lighted, rough apartment, removed some distance from the house proper, and connected with the servants' quarters, kitchen, and other detached buildings. Here all of the cloth used upon the Valentine plantations—Valencia, Rosemary, and Sligo—was, under Madame Valentine's direct supervision, spun, woven, cut, and made into garments.

Around the room, ranged upon shelves, were great bundles of the cream-white cloth, blue cottonade, and gray homespun. Piles of clothing, made and in the process of making, encumbered the long tables, or, baled ready for distribution, lay piled upon the floor.

The forewoman in charge of the sewing brought her reports and requests to madame. The spinners and weavers were absent, the looms were idle. Joy looked at these latter with great delight. "O tante," she begged, "pray let me weave a bit on this great loom. 'T is three times as large as any I ever touched before. We had no loom at home, and I, who wove all our wear, must go to Sister Longanecker's or some other neighbor's, carrying my thread."

Tante was not entirely convinced of the advisability of permitting a demoiselle to weave, there in the pres-

ence of the negroes; but as Ausite and Madeleine came in and added their entreaties to Joy's, she reluctantly consented.

Seating herself at the great loom, Joy took up the big shuttle and deftly flung it across, dipping her lithe young figure to the motion. Down came her little foot on the treadle, and as the reed crossed the warp she caught the shuttle again, tossed it back to the other side, and, swaying rhythmically, brought her foot down once more.

"I vow," exclaimed Ausite, "'t is almost like dancing—if there were only music now!"

Luis, who had been busied all morning at the lake with Neville, here put his head in the door. Seeing the slender, white-robed figure at the loom, he came inside crying, "Why, there should be no lack of music, for sure that is St. Cecilia's self seated there at her organ!"

Joy turned laughingly, never pausing in her work, to greet her cousin. The morning sun came through the window, and glorified her fair hair into such an aureole that Luis's comparison seemed not, after all, so strained.

And now, as she wove, Joy began to sing. It was the first time they had heard that fresh, caroling young voice of hers; for, having never sung in public anything other that Methodist hymns, she had not thought best to confess a singing voice at all. Now she raised it in a weaving-song which the negroes and Indians sang at the looms in Natchez. It was an old barbaric chant, cadenced to the swinging of her light, elastic body, and checked off into measure by the thud of the loom. She began in Massawippa's clear, liquid Cherokee, the many-voweled syllables of which flowed like purling water; and when she had sung all she remembered of those words, she fell back upon the negro version, whose refrain was, "Weave de shinin' gol'."

"Th'ow, th'ow de shuttle thoo, weäve de shinin' gol'," warbled the full, blithe voice. And while her fingers tossed the shuttle to and fro, weaving the creamy cloth, the morning sun flung his beams through the meshes of her bright hair and wove the shining gold.

Tante turned and, catching sight of Luis's rapt, ardent face, put a stop to the performance, declaring dryly that 't was all very pretty, but not fit work for a demoiselle, and she only wished that, instead of weaving, her dear little Joyous could dance so well.

As they left the loom-room, Luis took the opportunity to say aside to his cousin, "How cruel you are, Cousin Joyous, never to have sung to us before! Will you sing at my birthday fête to-morrow?" And Joy promised him a song for a birthday gift.

Early the following morning Luis sent a huge bunch of flowers to each of the girls, with the petition that they wear wreaths in their hair instead of hats, as this was a spring festival, and he intended that a queen, if not of May at least of April, should be crowned.

He had been up since dawn directing the work of the negroes, and even doing with his own hands some things which required special skill. A bountiful lunch, under charge of Celeste and old Simon, the butler, had been sent over to the spot selected for his picnic.

With the request that the girls wear wreaths came one also that they should dress in white. Joy's flowers were gardenias. Zette wound them into a thick white chaplet; but this, set over Joy's abundant hair, gave much too heavy an effect. Zette lifted off the crown impatiently. "Wait, missy," she said; "I make it pitty now."

Pulling out the pins, she loosened the elaborate structure which she had just built up with such care.

Joy's hair was almost to her knees, and very thick—a glory of sunlit bronze. The negress, who luxuriated in its light and warmth as in the sunshine itself, twisted the shining strangs around her dark fingers and drew the mass into a half dozen great, loose curled tresses. Then, narrowing the crown, she set it back in place, and exclaimed with delight over her own handiwork, "Momzell zess lak a li'l picshaw! All de gemmem goin' crezzy 'bout dis demoiselle dis day."

And Joyce was beautiful in her white dress, crowned with white flowers, while the same waxen blossoms formed a berthe about the neck of her half-low gown.

When the girls reached the carriages there was a wild outburst of enthusiasm over Joy's appearance, in which she was told that such hair as hers should never be bound up, that it was as wicked as prisoning sunshine to do so, and much more delightful nonsense of the sort. Then ensued a chattering of delight over the decorations of the vehicles. Luis had had his boys trimming them with fresh flowers since dawn; great bunches of yellow roses and big, odorous violets were knotted on the headstalls of the horses, while the carriages themselves were wreathed with flowers. "Ah, but just wait, *mes demoiselles*, until you see the boats," hinted Neville, with pride. "Lu and I put there our best skill, because 't would show best and last longer."

The main party was conveyed in a flat-boat or barge, twenty negro rowers, dressed in white, keeping time with their voices to the movement of the oars. Their vessel was banked around the edges with palmetto and laurel and the foliage of the magnolia, the center space being occupied by an awning which showed the United States flag and the French flag intertwined.

It chanced that the only French flag available for the purpose was a monster affair designed for trimming the house-front during the parade in honor of

Louis Philippe. "Behold, a big, big flag for maman, and a poor, little wee one for papa," whispered Ausite, mischievously.

The flags, however, were hardly seen for the lavish trimming of flowers, greenery, and gray moss. Beneath their canopy was a raised dais, and on it a seat covered with green velvet. This, Luis explained, was for the Queen of the Revels. " 'T is deemed best that we have a new queen every hour," he announced, "that the demoiselles be not jealous of each other; and maman shall be our first." He bowed gracefully, and led Madame Valentine to the throne.

Seated in the midst of the barge, she looked about on her children and the children of her friends. There was Toinette Cassard, whom she hoped Luis would marry. 'T was true the child was an ugly, dark little thing, but such a pedigree—and then, the money! And there were the sons of her old friends to whom she would like to give her daughters; but Ausite had no more idea of ranging herself than a butterfly, and Madeleine often talked as though she might wed the church rather than the youth of her mother's selection.

Madame's glance roved to Joyce—Joyce the mysterious, Joyce the beautiful, the fascinating, the unreadable—who had come like a young savage out of the wilderness and taken the land by storm. Really, these modern young people were very trying. They presumed to have ideas and preferences and fancies of their own. She was sure she never did so when she was a girl.

She closed her eyes with a little sigh. Presently Neville's fresh, young lips were pressed on her hand, and his irresistible boy's voice was asking: "What are your commands, O queen?"

Smiling indulgently she answered, "I command you

all to be happy," and composed herself for a brief nap. After all, a picnic was quite a comfortable affair.

It seemed a pity that the picnickers could not see their barge from the outside. The flower-trimmed boat, gay with fluttering streamers and flags, and the white-robed, wreath-crowned occupants, repeated and magnified in the water, made a beautiful picture.

They danced, they laughed, they sang, they flirted; they tried in every way to follow madame's command and be happy. Joyce had her brief reign as queen. Luis got his opportunity, when he installed her, to tell her that she was queen of his heart as well.

When Madeleine was enthroned, she declared that she desired her position of authority solely that she might command Cousin Joyous to sing. Joyce demurred. She knew, as she told them, only hymns and a few old English ballads which her father was used to sing.

Being laughingly answered that the queen's command might not be gainsaid, she brought out her best to please them, and the woes of "Cruel Barbara Allen," the praise of the "Nut Brown Mayde," and the tragic tale of "Edom o' Gordon" charmed her hearers mightily.

" 'Now all young maidens warning take from Cruel Barbara Allen,' " quoted Luis in a whispered aside as they disembarked.

Luncheon was spread for them in a grove. Joy's defense against Luis was Neville. An experienced woman would never have employed it; but to Joy, the stripling of sixteen was still a child. When they were taking their places around the improvised table for lunch, she noted that Luis was arranging matters so that he might sit beside her. To avoid this, she called the younger brother, and bade him take that place.

Nothing daunted, Luis came over after he had seen

all of his guests seated, and, putting his hand on Neville's shoulder, commanded, "Get up, little boy; 't is my place."

Neville turned to him a face white with passion. "Is 't so, *mon capitaine?* Then take it if you can," he retorted insolently.

Luis's face darkened. "Get up!" he repeated, in a fierce undertone.

"That will I not," answered his brother.

Luis's hand gripped the little cane he carried and snapped it. "I will flog you, sir, when I get you home," he said thickly. "You are too young to fight like a gentleman."

Simple horror had kept Joyce silent until now. She looked appealingly across to where Madame Valentine sat, serenely unconscious. " 'T was I asked Neville to sit here," she protested finally, in distress. "How can you speak so, Cousin Luis?"

"Oh, any command of the queen's!" rejoined Luis. "May I bring my chair and sit at your left, then, majesty? An we move a bit we may all sit here."

Joy was sure, from the black looks which traveled past her, that the quarrel between the brothers was postponed, not ended. Her heart sickened at the thought. To her eyes, shocked and sorrowful, the day was clouded, the gold of its sunshine tarnished. For all the beauty she saw in them, the gaily trimmed boats might as well have been funeral barges.

On the way home she found courage to speak to Luis of the matter. He was the elder and more responsible of the two. "Faith, sweet cousin," he answered, "women should not be so fair and so alluring if they do not wish men to fall out and quarrel over them."

"Oh, indeed, indeed, Luis," protested Joy, "it breaks my heart to hear you hint that the quarrel was about me. You only do it to flatter me, do you not, cousin?

I am not used to consider whether I be fair or no; but if I thought you in earnest I should wish I were old and gray and toothless, so that none would ever care to sit by me."

"So do not I, then, fair coz," answered Luis, gaily. "Be a little kinder to me—not cousinly kind, you understand, sweetheart, but kind in the way I crave—and, faith, I will not thrash the boy."

Ah, the gilt was wearing in great patches off poor Joy's gingerbread!

CHAPTER XXI

HEN Joy reached the dinner-table one day, she found a family council in progress. It was about four weeks after her arrival in New Orleans. There was much stir over the young Duke d'Orléans, afterward Louis Philippe of France.

This prince had arrived in the city some two weeks previous, in company with Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos. The don, ex-governor of the Natchez district, was now to succeed as governor of the Louisiana province.

To the Spaniards, young Orléans was a Bourbon; to the French—even republican French—he was dear as coming from that country which is to this day dearer than the land of their adoption.

Namesake of a Duc d'Orléans, the town, and more especially its French population, then its wealthiest and most influential class, was wild with enthusiasm over the duke's visit. On his first arrival, he had remained but a week, and was now gone, with his suite, to the plantation of a wealthy Frenchman to be entertained for a few days. It was their return to New Orleans which was being vivaciously, not to say stormily, discussed at her uncle's table.

Madame Valentine was a Frenchwoman to her finger-tips, a loyal adherent of the house of Bourbon. From her family, the LeBlancs, came the enormous

estates which made Henri Valentine the richest man of his time in New Orleans, if not in the entire province.

That her beloved prince should return to the city and not be fêted and honored according to his deserts was a thing which madame could not endure. Joy had never before seen her aunt angry; but now it was evident the lady was in a towering passion.

"But, my dear, 't would not have been appropriate," urged her husband. "I myself, who esteem the prince, cannot see how the United States authorities could have ordered public demonstrations of any sort in honor of one of the house of Bourbon."

These well-meant words appeared about to precipitate a rupture in the Valentine family. Madame arose, drew herself up very tall indeed, and Joy observed for the first time how handsome and imposing a woman she really was. "Very well, Henri Valentine; you may quote a canaille government to me, an 't please you"—("But I do not, my love," put in her husband in swift parenthesis)—"you may be willing that only the Spaniard do a fitting part in the matter. I and my children will honor a royal prince of France. 'T will not be the first one hath lodged with the Le-Blancs. The Duc d'Orléans shall come to my house, if he will."

"As a private citizen, I have n't the slightest objection in the world," put in her husband again, "to entertain the prince."

"And I will give him a ball," she concluded. "I will show these beggarly Americans how to treat royalty," and she swept out of the room, her head held very high indeed.

Ausite and Madeleine, relieved from the constraint of her presence, embraced each other and Joy in transports at the thought of a ball and a real prince.

"Oh, the dear maman! Oh, the charming maman!"

they cried over and over again; then, running to their father with that amiability which was to Joy one of their greatest charms, they inquired, "You are not angry, are you, *mon père?* You want to entertain the dear prince, too? Ah, we will make a good Frenchman of the dear little papa in time!"

Luis, an officer in the Spanish army, but always a Frenchman at heart, seconded his mother's plans enthusiastically.

Ausite and Madeleine dragged Joy off directly after dinner. "Oh, the frocks!" cried Ausite, clasping her hands and rolling up her big, black eyes with an almost religious fervor. "Will there be anything fine enough in New Orleans, think you, sweet sister? O Madeleine!" she shrieked, with a comical drop of dismay in her tones, "you are the eldest demoiselle of the house of Valentine. 'T is you the prince will dance with, and I shall only get to worship him afar off."

Madeleine nodded, and began practising a few airy dancing-steps, ending with a grand curtsy in which she sank almost to the floor, veiling her big eyes demurely and murmuring, "*Mon prince,*" as she gracefully recovered herself.

The sight of her satisfaction so irritated Ausite that she pounced upon her and shook her, crying, "Horrid old maid! Why art not wed, and out of the way? I want to be Mamselle Valentine."

"Well," returned Madeleine, composedly, "here 's sweet Cousin Joyous; she 's older than either of us." (Madeleine was seventeen and Ausite fifteen.) "Old maids! Cousin Joyous was an old maid five years ago. Let her be demoiselle de Valentine, and dance with the prince." Ausite agreed rather doubtfully; Madeleine's generosity in such matters went far beyond her own.

"But I cannot dance at all," objected Joy, who

scarcely understood how great the sacrifice if this thing were actually done for her.

"But 't is an art one may learn," urged Madeleine. "'Sieur Pas Seul will soon set that right. I shall speak to maman about it," she added seriously. "Methinks we should offer the prince the best we have; and, sweet cousin, were I a man, I know right well whom I should call best among the demoiselles de Valentine."

Down in a cross alley leading from Royal Street there stood, in the year of grace 1798, a low, dingy little building abutting directly upon the street. It was a mean structure, yet it was frequented by the youth, fashion, and beauty of the town. Carefully wrapped young beauties descended from elegant volantes before its dingy portals at all hours of the day; and in the evening the most dapper of beaux might be seen lifting its tarnished knocker.

This was the home of Monsieur Legras, playfully nicknamed by his pupils 'Sieur Pas Seul. The old man had been ballet-master at the Comédie Française. He had come to the New World to mend his fortunes, and had marred them. But here in New Orleans, though he no longer trained *premières danseuses* to dazzle an audience, he was the beloved instructor of the most beautiful and graceful women in the world, as he was wont affectionately to call them. The dance was a passion with the little, brown, withered Frenchman. It was to him what poetry is to the poet, or music to the musician. A docile pupil, the faultless rendering of a difficult series of steps, a perfect pose—these moved him almost to tears. On the other hand, inelegance, awkwardness, and, worst of all, a lack of veneration for the traditions of the dance, aroused him to a sort of frenzy.

He had taught Ausite and Madeleine since they were wee toddlers beginning, as most Creole girls do, to

dance and to walk at one and the same time. When it was suggested to Joy that she learn to dance, she protested in dismay. Then she began to reason upon it, and some good man has said that "he who reasons upon a question of right and wrong is already damned." Be that as it may, Joy, after thoroughly canvassing the matter in her own mind, recollected that Father Tobias had desired her while she was with her uncle's family to conform to their customs, and to test herself by living their life as fully as possible. She decided then promptly that she would take the instruction offered her.

Pastor Valentine had not realized the impression such words might make upon his daughter's mind. That things which had long lost, or never contained, charms for him should tempt her—this he had expected. But that she should show herself so ill prepared to meet these temptations he could not have conceived. Joyce was as radical in the doing as he was vague in the instructing.

Tante sighed a little regretfully when the matter was broached to her. "She is indeed, methinks, something to offer a king; but, my little demoiselles, you have rated your importance quite too high. I know not what is coming to the young people of this day. Meseems they are all stark mad on the subject of themselves. 'T is the fat old maman who entertains the duke, pray remember, and 't is she who will open the ball with him. But if I read the princes of Bourbon aright, so high and so bright a head as our cousin's here will not escape his eye. Why was not one of you a blonde, you little blackamoors? The père is blonde enough."

"Oh, well, maman," quoth Madeleine, "you have an assortment of blonde daughters coming on. Our little Hortense is nigh as fair as cousin Joyous. When

Ausite is wed and I am in a convent, you will have blondes of all shades for sale."

"*Tiens!* little one," said madame, affectionately; "we shall hear no more of convents when your prince comes."

"Lord send him soon!" cried Ausite, flippantly. "I am tired of playing second violin."

"Fly away, birdies, and take little cousin with you," smiled madame. "Celeste may accompany you to M. Legras's, if neither Tante Leonie nor Tante Sophie can do so this morning. Fail not to wear your pretty frocks and carry flowers. The poor old man so rages when you attend in careless toilets."

The girls, to Joy's great surprise, were dressed by their maids as though for a fête. "'Sieur Pas Seul," they explained, insisted that dancing was a matter of emotion as well as muscle, and that no lady could learn to dance as a lady should unless *en grande tenue*.

Maids attended, carrying bags with special slippers, extra scarfs, smelling-bottles, and dozens of other trifles. Tante Sophie, a seventh or eighth cousin of madame's, and a gentle, faded, self-effacing little person, proved to be at liberty, and accompanied them.

Though the distance was not more than three blocks, the volante was brought around and the trip made in state. The girls greeted very warmly the bright-eyed little old man who met them, violin in hand, and presented their cousin with much pride. A half-dozen demoiselles, some near their own age, but mostly younger, were leaving as they arrived. Ausite and Madeleine appeared to know them all, and Joy went through the ordeal of more introductions, an ordeal to which she was becoming used.

When 'Sieur Pas Seul was informed that the tall cousin came as a pupil, he looked her over rather

doubtfully. That upright, almost majestic young figure promised more strength than suppleness.

Ausite had already been slippered by her maid. Now she was capering madly about the room, taking steps which seemed to Joy to be as entirely without plan or forethought as the erratic darts of a drifting butterfly, but which wove themselves finally into a rhythmic and charming dance.

This slight, dainty little Creole maid appeared, as Zette admiringly whispered, not to have a bone in her body. She bent, she swayed, she caught a tambourine from the maid's hand and, dropping back with it, struck it lightly upon the floor. Then, like a blossoming branch tossed by the wind, she flung forward and tapped the tambourine upon the floor just in front of her two little feet.

Joyce watched these evolutions, pleasing as they were, with a sort of terror. Would she be expected to do all that? She felt that she never, never could learn it; and then, with this conviction, there came a dogged resolution to master these things or perish in the attempt.

The thought that Ausite—little, laughing, foolish Ausite—was passed mistress of arts whose first syllable she knew not, was intolerable. She had been praised for many things. Now the feverish unrest which assails the novice in a life of pleasure, the aspiration to excel everywhere, to dominate everybody, laid hold upon her. She would dance—she would dance better than Ausite or Madeleine. And with this rash resolve she turned to 'Sieur Legras, who was talking gravely to her cousin.

"Mamselle has never danced at all?" he inquired dolefully. "And she s'all learn it all in two veeks? C'est impossible, mamselles." He shrugged his shoulders, raised his eyebrows, and smiled deprecatingly.

"Oh, but I will try very, very hard," urged Joy, eagerly. She had quite forgotten that she once thought this dancing might be deadly sin; she was resolved, if necessary, to practise all night and every night till The Day arrived.

"Mamselle can be teach to pose," suggested the old 'sieur. "Ah, zo beautiful she could pose!"

"Pose?" asked Joy, hopeful that she had found something possible to her. "How is that done, 'sieur?"

The old dancing-master laid down his violin, gazed at her thoughtfully, then came across to where she stood. Madeleine and Ausite both looked on with much interest, while the maids and Tante Sophie watched the performance eagerly. "Zo, now," he directed, taking her head lightly between the tips of his fingers. "Raise ze chin a leetle, an' look t'roo ze window at ze sky."

With a deft movement he shifted her shoulders into better position, then brought a rapier from the wall, put it in her hand, and lifted her arm so that she brandished the blade above her head. "O-o-o! But not zo steef, mamselle. 'T is a young queen now, which lead her armies. Hark! ze trumpet sound."

He picked up his violin, and drew from it a martial strain. "Listen," he said; "ze trumpet call to victoree or date."

Music was a language Joy could understand. The dingy little room faded away before her eyes. Once more she stood in the flicker of firelight on the hearth at home, and confronted death with upraised rifle.

She was recalled to the time and place by the 'sieur's voice crying, "Magnifique eet ees!" Tante Sophie exclaiming, "Oh, how grand she is!" and Ausite whimpering, "Yes, but she 's terrible, too. I shall be afraid of her at night after this."

She dropped the sword-point, laughed, and felt ex-

tremely silly. After all, if this was dancing, she thought it a very simple play in which to excel.

Poor Joyce, she little knew what was before her! After this bit of triumph there came a laborious and a terrible hour, in which she was patiently instructed in the primary and fundamental dancing-steps. In the course of this session 'Sieur Pas Seul was almost reduced to imbecility. He rumpled his gray hair frantically (Ausite declared he tore it), and just when Joyce was brought to the verge of wrathful hysterics he announced, with a sigh, "Dat vill do."

"Cannot she learn it, 'Sieur Legras?" inquired Madeleine, in the hushed voice of dismay. She knew the weather signs of the old man's countenance.

"I zink she learn it zomtime," gasped the dancing-master; "maybe ven she try vair' hard."

"Oh, but she must learn in two weeks—a minuet, anyhow."

"Zo?" inquired the teacher, in a tone which was anything but encouraging, and the directions, the reproofs, the scrapings of the violin, and Joy's awkward attempts began all over again.

This time the lesson was shorter. "Now," said the 'sieur, in concluding it, "eef you vill vork vair' hard and practeeze vair' mooch, I zink I try teach you ze sword minuet. Zee," he added, with great generosity, for a pupil like Joy was a sad trial to his soul, "zat beautiful, bright head vill be charmante ven eet coom down ze line under ze beeg steel blades—zhust a leetle, leetle dust of powdaire vill turn heem to ze pure gold."

That night at bedtime, after Joy had turned Ausite and Madeleine out of her room, she practised, and practised, and practised the steps which had been taught her, till too weary to practise more. And when she laid her tired young limbs upon the bed and closed her

eyes, it was to practise them over in her dreams. At dawn she was awake and practising again. And Zette, who could dance all the wild, half-savage negro dances, and had learned from attending upon her young mistresses all the steps they knew, acted as coach.

The household was never astir before ten o'clock. Chocolate was served in bed, but Joy was too busy and too desperately resolute to take hers. So she bowed, and stepped, and bent, and wheeled, and curtsied, every muscle aching, her head swimming, her hands trembling, till she heard Madeleine's light step coming toward the door.

Then she sat down, and, reaching to the little stand beside her bed, picked up a book by way of assuming a deceptive air of leisure. This volume proved to be her long-neglected Bible. Madeleine's pretty head peeped in at the door. She glanced at the volume, and, saying reverently, "I will not disturb your devotions, cousin," retired.

Joy bent her crimson face above the sacred pages, and wept for shame. Was this creature, so greedy of admiration and dominion, to whom no labors were tedious and painful if they but enabled her to flaunt and to outshine—was she indeed the woman who, six months ago, had been so absolutely sure of herself? to whom right and wrong had seemed so perfectly distinct and clear that none need err? She had descended to hypocrisy, had used the sacred Word to cloak light behavior, and she shuddered a little at the remembrance that she had not for days read the Book.

Was she that woman who had dared fancy herself the instrument which, in divine hands, might effect the conversion of other souls? She had been so strong in her own conceit when she lectured and exhorted Jessop, she had dared to pronounce him weak and unstable; and now, at the first touch of temptation, she

had fallen quite away from all her early traditions, hopes, plans, ambitions, beliefs. She had forgotten even Jessop himself.

She wondered at her own abandoned moral condition, yet with a dull, impersonal curiosity which promised no speedy amendment. She would go on to the end with this which she had chosen.

It was characteristic of Joyce, of her thoroughness in well or ill doing, that, having mastered her emotion, she laid her Bible back upon the stand, and, lifting her skirts, began once more the monotonous one, two, three —one, two, three.

To such good purpose did she practise—though ever with that haunting doubt that the little feet whose beauty Jessop had been first to notice were, with each measured step, traveling the certain way to perdition—that the 'sieur, when her next lesson came, exclaimed with delight over the progress she had made.

The way in which these people among whom she now was carried their religion along side by side with the frivolities of every-day life was a matter of continual wonder to Joyce. She had gone with the girls when they went to the cathedral to confess. They tripped lightly in, chatting of balls or beaux and frocks and furbelows up to the very last moment. When they came out, it was to go with maman to a *fête champêtre* at a great house over by the river, where both girls danced tirelessly. Yet she perceived the confession to be a genuine religious observance.

Tante said a dozen times daily, "Now don't forget that, petites, when you go to confession." The words might be preceded or followed by some trivial household direction, or a light jest even, but Tante intended they should be obeyed, and obeyed they were.

While Joy had led what most people—what she herself—would have believed to be a much more religious

life than these relatives of hers, she felt that she had always held her religion a thing apart, that she had never woven it into the fabric of her daily living as they did.

Another thing which abashed her in those whose creed she had been taught to regard as error, was their simple, uncondemning attitude. Uncle Henri was a lax Catholic, Tante Sophie a very strict and devout one; and yet, to Joy's great surprise, the sister-in-law did not appear to think 'Sieur Valentine in need of discipline, nor did 'Sieur Valentine hold Tante Sophie unnecessarily zealous.

There was a warm, sweet, kindly tolerance in all their thoughts of each other, which Joy was sometimes near believing to be the virtue of all virtues. In after years, when time had helped her to understanding, she knew such tolerance was indeed approved by Him who said, "The greatest of these is charity."

Had she been narrow, cold, hard, overbearing, too zealous in her crude self-righteousness? She began to think so. She was learning that one need not become a Catholic to love and revere the Catholic faith, to find the face of God behind the picture which any creed might make of Him, and to be neither ashamed nor afraid that she did so.

CHAPTER XXII

THE Valentine household was in a state of modified uproar. It required near upon a week of these conditions to prepare for the grand ball. Madame Valentine was an able woman, but an entertainment of such magnitude as this would tax the resources of any private house; indeed, our country then boasted few in which it could have been attempted. In 1798 the florist and caterer were unknown auxiliaries to the entertainer. The floral decorating, the enormous amount of cookery, must all be done under one roof, and largely by the servants of the household. The wealth which Madame Valentine had brought her husband included three extensive plantations. Every fruit which the section produced was raised upon these plantations, and Madame Valentine's store-room was furnished with jars of orange conserve and marmalade, flasks of fine liqueurs, preserves, jellies, and dried and candied fruits beyond computation.

As the date of the ball approached, Tante's temper became extremely brittle. Joy, realizing her uselessness, effaced herself as much as possible, and remained in her own room, practising ceaselessly upon the steps of the minuet, which 'Sieur Pas Seul admitted she now did fairly well. She was learning also, under Madeleine's direction, how to hold her hands, how to make the grand curtsy, how to enter and leave a ball-

room, how to manage her skirts when she sat down, and her scarf at all times.

It had appeared, before this question of the ball came up, that Joy knew very well how to behave herself as a young demoiselle should; but now everything had to be pulled to pieces and made over in honor of the duke. The girl came to feel finally that she knew absolutely nothing, and was entirely unpresentable.

She had at first proposed to wear on this occasion the ball-gown purchased for a rout given by one of the Spanish officials early in her visit; but Tante forbade this almost fiercely. "My two chicks," she said, "are having as pretty frocks made for them as money will buy. If you do not have as fine, or finer, everybody will surmise, and I shall feel, that 't is because you sympathize with the canaille, and care not to do honor to a royal duke of France." This closed the argument, and Tante felt free to design and purchase such a costume as she deemed fitting for her beautiful niece.

Madeleine's dress was a rich white silk, brocaded with great bunches of blush-roses tied with love-knots of pale blue. Its long, pointed waist had a stomacher of pink crush-roses set thickly together and matching in hue those brocaded upon the skirt. A dainty wreath of miniature roses, with their buds, was to be used for the hair. Maman did not approve of powder for young girls, so that it was only after much entreaty that Madeleine received permission to wear "just enough to make her eyes bright."

Ausite's frock was, she sulkily said, a "silly, missish thing." It was an exquisitely embroidered muslin from India, with cherry ribbons. Madame Valentine well appreciated the value of consistency in the dressing of young girls. The slippers, laces, gloves, and jewels which formed the accessories of her daughters' cos-

tumes were irreproachable, and through everything ran the note of girlish simplicity.

With Joy, who was twenty—quite mature, according to Creole ideas—she felt that she could be more lavish. "I would I had a poet to help me design your frock, my dear. It shall be something really like you, something to put those who see it in mind of fresh wild things. 'T is my feeling when I look at you that I want to make your wear become you as the leaves become the young trees in the forest."

The ball gown, when it came home, almost frightened Joy with its costliness and its beauty. Her aunt had chosen a soft, heavy silk of a silvery-green tint. Around the edges and in trails up the breadths of the skirt, ran a thick wrought garland of deep-green leaves and creamy-white blossoms. There were silver threads and tiny artificial pearls mingled with the embroidery, so that the effect, while one of dewy freshness, was wonderfully rich and brilliant.

Joyce Valentine was lithe but not thin. Slender she was, but with the slimness of youth only. There were bones, one knew, to be covered, but they were guessed at, not seen. The long waist, which fitted her pliant young body as the calyx clasps the flower bud, was entirely plain, except for a massive garland and stomacher of the same creamy-white blossoms. In this case they were not embroidered, but, formed of pearls and silver bullion, stood quite free from the fabric. The slippers were white, with scarlet heels, the long gloves a marvel of pearl embroidery and inset lace. For her hair, upon which madame decided to permit, as 'Sieur Pas Seul had suggested, barely a dust of shining powder, there was a single silver lily amid its own gleaming dark leaves.

This dress haunted Joy's dreams. There seemed something significant, almost prophetic, in the fact

that, in spite of its richness, it reminded her strangely of the old simple days at home. The green was just the tint which the young leaves showed when first they unrolled themselves in springtime. The white flowers were like many she had been wont to gather in the near grove as a child. The sight of the pretty toilet brought tears to her eyes, and, for the first time since her visit began, a sort of faint, homesick longing to her heart.

On the day before the ball an army of negroes from the near-by plantation took possession of the house. 'Sieur Valentine had fled on an ostensible business trip. Luis was at the barracks. Neville, who was a member of a junior military organization, was away on duty. The brood of little ones was strictly pent within the nursery. Ausite and Madeleine were wrestling with the final alterations of the modiste. Joy, in her own room, practised her endless dancing-steps. Madame Valentine had her own large chair carried from place to place by an attendant; in it she sat and directed the work. All heavy hangings in the great parlors were taken down. Garlands of palm leaves, wild vines, and gray moss took their places. On the night of the ball, myriads of fresh flowers would be added to these. The floors were rubbed, waxed, and rubbed again to perfect dancing condition. The brasses were polished, and fresh candles set in all the sconces.

Madame sat like an enchantress. She was perfectly inert, except for hands and voice. When one of those plump, white, bejeweled members was waved it set in motion at once a train of black servitors, who hastened to do her bidding. Celeste and Tante Sophie, who appeared to be her familiars, were sent flying in all directions upon all sorts of errands.

When the ball-rooms above-stairs were well under way, madame's chair was carried out through the gallery across the grassy back court to the kitchens. In

these precincts she remained, directing and planning, for the greater part of two days. A ball supper, at that time and place, was no flimsy affair, but a heavy, substantial meal. The key-note of all the preparations was over-lavish abundance.

Madame could not be content till the rooms set apart for the duke and that portion of his suite which would remain with him were finally redecorated and refurnished. She wanted them in blue and silver, with the lilies of France appearing everywhere in the decorations. 'Sieur Valentine groaned over the bills for this particular folly; but since Madame Valentine was spending her own money, he preserved a discreet silence.

More than a thousand invitations had been issued, and preparations were made to entertain almost so many, as, though a number of the guests were bidden from outlying parishes, the interest in Louis Philippe's visit being great, it was believed nearly all invited would attend. Since the great drawing-rooms were used for ball-rooms, there remained no apartment of sufficient size to serve as banquet-hall for such an occasion. To answer this purpose the broad gallery surrounding the courtyard at the back of the house was walled with heavy white cloth, such as Joy had seen woven down in the loom-room. This creamy surface made an excellent background for garlands of flowers and evergreens, streamers and flags.

Twenty of the negroes were busy all day, under Tante Sophie's direction, finishing this part of the decorative scheme. Celeste, drilling the maids for the ladies' cloak-rooms, marshaled and trained her force with the precision of a sergeant instructing a military squad. She was severe in the matter of turbans, and even acrimonious upon the subject of aprons.

When the evening arrived, Joy's heart mounted with

a feverish exultation and delight. Zette worked for hours arranging the bright hair, pomading, powdering, whitening, and beautifying the small hands, and seeing that every detail was perfect. When the three girls were dressed, long before the earliest guest was expected to arrive—nothing dilatory was tolerated in that well-disciplined household—they went dutifully to present themselves to maman.

Her own daughters she kissed and commended warmly, but her eyes traveled past them to rest with even greater approval upon Joy. "Now, my niece," she said, "you look as every girl should look once in her life—your very best. That frock was an inspiration. 'T is like a young willow-tree when the sun strikes across it; but"— and she drew her dark brows together—"there is something lacking. What is it? Ah, I have it now."

She was sitting, three maids at work over her toilet, while she talked composedly. Almost upsetting Celeste, who was busily fitting on her slippers, she turned and drew a key from a casket upon the dressing-table beside her. Tossing it to the kneeling Celeste, she bade her, "There, take that, go to the armoire, and bring me my little old jewel-case—not the one in use, you understand—the black one with the silver clasps, the casket *de ma grande maman.*"

This brought and opened on her lap, she sought out from among the quaint old trinkets some ornaments in silver settings, a most peculiar combination of pearls and diamonds. The stones were not large, but they were extremely clear and brilliant, and the effect, while unusual, was singularly suited to Joy's costume.

"Here, petite," she said to Madeleine, "I cannot rise to put them on, so do you place them; you have good taste."

When Joy was led before the mirror in the great

ball-room, she saw the reflection of a tall, slender figure in pale shimmering green, garlanded like a wood nymph with blossoms and leaves. The costume was cool, chaste, exquisite; only the starry eyes and the rich scarlet of her lips gave life and vivacity to her appearance. At sight of her own loveliness, an intoxication seized upon her. She was in a world where beauty counted for everything, and she saw that she was beautiful. The old Joyce Valentine dropped finally away from her, the chrysalis was burst, and the butterfly spread its dazzling new wings to flutter awhile in the sunshine of pleasure and adulation.

Meantime guests had begun to arrive, music was wailing through the rooms—the wonderful Spanish music of harp, viol, and violin, and the lighter French music of the guitar.

Joyce was in line with her cousins to receive the guests. Maman had said, when she told her daughters that the duke was to open the ball with herself, and might dance thereafter with whom he chose, "I miss my count if a prince of the house of Bourbon overlooks a fair head like this."

Now, as Joyce stood, taller than her two pretty cousins, pulsing through every vein and tingling in every nerve and fiber with the sheer delight and vainglory of being young and beautiful and admired, the duke's eyes did indeed rest upon her, and, "Your eldest daughter is blonde," he observed to maman. "You Americans puzzle me with your piquant contrasts."

It was explained to him that the demoiselle was a niece, and not a daughter. He continued to gaze at her approvingly. The ball had been opened, the duke dancing with Madame Valentine. His highness had asked a dance of each of her daughters. He then expressed a desire to dance with the charming niece.

Joy was rapt in utter ecstasy. It would not have

seemed strange nor embarrassing to her if the moon had dipped down from heaven to salute her. When the young duke stood before her, debonair and graceful, she answered him as frankly and smilingly as she would have answered David in the old cabin at home. "I should be so happy and proud to, monseigneur; but I can only dance one dance, and perhaps that is not the one for which you will ask me."

"You can only—" began the duke, and broke off inquiringly. A demoiselle who was strictly limited to one dance was something new in his experience.

"I mean that I have only learned how to dance one," explained Joy, innocently.

"But, pardon, how was that?" inquired his grace, with interest. "Will Tante permit? May I sit beside you and talk to you?"

It seemed, when interrogated upon the subject, that Tante would permit. Orléans, with a graceful salute and a murmured word of thanks, seated himself beside Joy. And there, before the envious eyes of the most brilliant society which the New World could produce, this young backwoods woman, whose highest ambition had once been to become a Methodist preacher, monopolized, entertained, and charmed the one scion of royalty present, the future King of France.

The duke's English was excellent, interlarded with French words and phrases which Joy comprehended perfectly and was even beginning to use since her stay at her uncle's house.

She told him, in answer to his questions, of 'Sieur Pas Seul and her earnest practisings. "So that I might dance genteelly at this your ball, monseigneur," she said.

"And you can dance like an angel now?" hazarded he, laughing.

"No," returned Joy, soberly; "but I have learned it;

I can dance it correctly. You need not fear to ask me; I shall not make any mistake if you ask me for the one dance I know."

"And what dance is that?" inquired the duke, still smiling. She was really too delicious, this little provincial.

"It is the sword minuet," replied Joyce. "The 'sieur thought my head would look well going down the line of swords, because it is fair."

The duke's face clouded a little. So many fair heads had gone down before the swords of France in his day that the association of ideas was not a pleasant one.

"Mademoiselle, then, is promised to me for the sword minuet," he agreed. "And now will you tell me, since you say you live at Natchez, why I did not see you at the ball there? Were you already here visiting the good Uncle Valentine?"

At the inquiry, the ball-room and its lights, the duke's elegant young figure, swam for an instant quite away from Joy's consciousness. She was the wondering girl standing upon the hearth-stone at home, adoring and envying Jessop's magnificence. After all, she had seen nothing so beautiful since. The duke, in blue and silver, with his orders and medals—those orders which Jessop had mentioned and which she had then misunderstood—was more the finicky fine gentleman and less the fairy prince than he who knelt and claimed her for his princess on that never-to-be-forgotten evening.

"I was at Natchez, monseigneur, and I dressed the hair of one of the gentlemen who attended your ball," said Joy, with one of her sudden and characteristic flashes of mischievous fun.

"Is mademoiselle, then, a dresser of gentlemen's hair?" returned Orléans, demurely. "May one hope

to profit by her talents? Mine own hair-dresser (now I hear of this) is quite unsatisfactory. But why, having dressed the gentleman's head, did you not dress your own and attend the ball?"

The extent of all she would have to explain to this man, to whom her former life was quite an unknown tongue, showed Joy more clearly than anything yet had done how far she had traveled from that old self of hers. She began by telling him that she was a Methodist, that her creed did not permit dancing or indulgence in any of the pleasures of the gay world. She added that her father had now sent her to test herself in this same world before going back to take up her old life and to assume, perhaps, her calling as a preacher of the Word.

"So mademoiselle is dévote," returned Orléans, comprehendingly, "and she goes back to the—the—convent, is it not?—after this visit."

Joy smilingly explained once more; but, after all, a convent, she thought, meant to him what her life stood for to her.

"And mademoiselle has learned to dance—for me? She will dance this once with me before she goes back to renounce the world? *Quel honneur* for a poor exile!"

"Yes, monseigneur, I shall dance with you, and I shall never dance again." The words came almost without volition. Joy had made no such resolution, and yet once the thing was said she knew that it was true. The statement itself, the tone in which she spoke, and a something tender and exalted that came into her face as the words were uttered, touched the young duke strangely. He believed, not unnaturally, that it was devotion to the cause he represented which prompted all.

"Ah, but mademoiselle should dance many times.

Such beauty as hers should never be in eclipse," he protested.

"I beg you to believe," said Joyce, returning to her laughing manner, "that I can do many things better than I can dance."

"For instance—?" interrogated the duke.

"Bake, brew, spin, weave, handle an ax or a rifle—and dress gentlemen's heads withal," she returned archly.

"Faith, 't is an accomplished demoiselle," jested Orléans. He took her enumerations for simple pleasantry. "And where, may I ask," he continued, "did these little hands learn to wield an ax or handle a rifle?"

Joyce gave some brief description of her life at Natchez which would account for the wood-chopping. It was all so strange and new to this man, and to other guests who began to cluster around and listen as she spoke, that when Orléans asked, "And what of the rifle?" there was a general murmur of inquiry from those near.

Joy's spirits had mounted, as those of a young girl at her first ball must mount, yet her exaltation had a deeper spiritual significance. These people were not her people, this world was not her world, and she moved among them, and in it, intoxicated by her own emotions indeed, but composed as a child among puppets. They were to her no more than a bright show. Their homage, their adulation, added its little share to the free, wild rapture which coursed through her. Had they turned their backs, had they sneered, it seemed to her that it could not have reached Joyce Valentine. With no more embarrassment than if she had been speaking to the playmates of her childhood in the little meeting-house at home, she began to tell the story of how and why a woman learns to use a rifle in the backwoods.

Maman was divided between pride in her niece's conquest and a tremulous uneasiness as to the propriety of a demoiselle attracting so much attention. Drawn into the circle, she listened with the others. Joyce held her audience with the unerring instinct of the natural raconteur. They saw with her eyes. Again, in that brilliant ball-room, the great, sullen Mississippi crept beside the bank where the little cabin stood; the cane-brake whispered around it, the painted savages lurked without, the wild-cat's moaning call came from the thicket, the settlers barricaded and defended their homes.

When she ended there was a long-drawn sigh among her listeners, better applause than the hand-clapping and vivacious exclamations which followed it. Failure, Joy felt, could not touch her; but this unexpected and overwhelming success did slightly abash. To Madame Valentine's great relief, Orléans himself ended a situation which she, as hostess, felt was growing impossible. Rising, he bowed profoundly.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "you are indeed an enchantress. You transport your hearers whither you will, so that they forget time and place. But, I pray you, forget not that the next dance but one is that which you have called my dance, and which I shall herafter forever call—ours."

CHAPTER XXIII

HE ball given by that loyal Frenchwoman, born Le Blanc, then Madame Henri Valentine, to the exiled nephew of him whom she still proudly called "our martyred king," went down in tradition as the "royal ball."

The festivities were at their height. Couples were ranged at the head of the long ball-room for the sword minuet, Louis Philippe and Mistress Joyce Valentine dancing together.

Captain Luis Valentine had invited a fellow-soldier and United States officer to the ball. This officer, Colonel Burr, represented that there were then in New Orleans two friends of Master Tobias and Mistress Joyce Valentine who should also be bidden to attend. These friends were Major Mountfalcon a'Jessop and Master David Batchelor, the latter there on business connected with the levees at Natchez.

These four men, walking together, entered the ball-room just as Mistress Joy, leading her train of beauties, came stepping down under the arching steel. She was taller than those who followed her. Her red-gold head was lifted high. Added to the light, balancing step of the minuet, there was something free and wild and unconquerable in her bearing. Her eyes glowed exultantly, her red lips were parted, the light of a thousand lusters seemed to center in her bright hair. It was the supreme moment. The tide was at its

height, and as she touched high-water mark something back of her triumphant rapture told her that after this there could come nothing but ebb.

"Behold our little Methodist preacher, queen of the revels! Who would have believed it? And yet 't was always in her," cried Burr, gaily.

"My cousin looks a goddess, rather than a queen," corrected Luis Valentine, a trifle stiffly. His dark eyes were fixed upon Joy with passionate adoration—an open adoration Jessop at once noted and resented.

"Neither rôle, methinks, suits Mistress Valentine. She was born to be a saint, rather than queen or goddess. I have seen her look better." He spoke in a surly tone, which provoked from Burr a half-smothered burst of laughter.

David's equable face was turned upon the young beauty with simple delight in her loveliness. Whether he felt or thought further than that, it would have been impossible to say. His tall, fine form just within the open door, his bright, keen, kindly eyes glancing interestedly about the unfamiliar scene, David Batchelor, in his handsome and becoming attire, was, even in that brilliant assemblage, a noble and striking figure.

His towering fair head topped that of the tallest man in the room. His clear gaze held neither the wonder of a child looking at things beyond his round of knowledge, nor the patronage of an elder, directed toward the amusements of those beneath him in understanding. It was the level look of kind equality which gave to those about him the privilege of enjoying with his endorsement that for which he himself did not care.

As they spoke, the music rose upon a brave crescendo, the lines of dancers once more parted, the swords which had been sheathed were drawn from their scabbards and leaped aloft like quivering flames. Beneath their overarching brightness, Louis Philippe bent low

"MISTRESS JOY LEADING HER TRAIN OF BEAUTIES."

to salute his partner. "The whimsy of fate!" commented Burr. "To see that little Methody dancing with a possible sovereign—yea, and carrying all off with a high hand!"

Jessop's dissatisfied glance roamed over the gorgeous rooms and the splendid company. He was angry that there seemed nothing at which to take exception. It galled his pride to think that Joy, through no agency of his, was enjoying—yes, and adorning—such a scene. There was in his heart, too, a lingering jealousy of this new Joyce for the sake of the old. Her appeal to him had been in the days past stronger than it now was. He was beginning to see that if he should promote her to this life, her charm for him would be impaired, if not destroyed.

As the dance ceased, Joy caught sight of the four men standing together, and gave them such greeting as a young sovereign might have done—just a mere lowering of the lids and a faint bend of the regal young head. The ebbing of her tide of rapture had not yet set in. Orléans having returned his partner to her aunt's side, Captain Valentine pressed forward to entreat Joy for a dance, and to reproach her for never having looked his way the entire evening.

"Nay, Cousin Luis, I have danced for the last time; this I have promised his highness," was her answer, very lightly and idly given.

Luis was furious. Had she been the most finished coquette, she could scarcely have selected a reply more calculated to fan the flame of his fancy. Her promise to the duke had been in reality a compact with her own soul, but this he could not know. She now asked Tante's permission to have Luis take her across, that she might speak to these gentlemen, who were friends of her father's. Luis, glad to be of service and sorry to assist her to what he supposed would be fresh con-

quests, escorted her with mingled gallantry and reluctance.

Burr, as the eldest man of the group, was greeted first—Joy was learning social usage famously.

Then she turned to Jessop—Jessop, resplendent in his white satin and powder and lace, with the diamonds returned to their places on shoe-buckle, hand, and frill—the fairy prince well met in fairyland. There was no thrill of expectation at thought or sight of him, no quickening of the pulses.

There he stood, handsomer than the duke, he who had given her her first lessons in love, and yet—and yet—was he anything to her now?

She turned eagerly to David. "When saw you my father, Master Batchelor? Was he well, and did he send any message by you?"

She felt an absurd impulse to ask Jessop, Colonel Burr, and her cousin to go away, while she should talk to Batchelor of the chickens and the cats, of Reasie and Sister Longanecker and the meetings of the Society and the old homely details which used to make up life for her.

David must have read something of this in her face, for he answered very kindly, though with a half smile. "Mistress Valentine, I have, from various sources, many messages for you, the which I will deliver hereafter. Perchance I may have speech with you to-morrow. I go home on the day following, and you may desire to return these greetings."

Colonel Burr, who had engaged Luis in conversation, covertly watched the three others. He seemed to find something amusing in the situation of affairs, and said finally to David: "My friend Captain Valentine hath promised, if Major Jessop will take the belle of the ball to her chaperone, to present us to what would be, were Mistress Valentine not present, the prettiest demoiselle in the room."

Left together, a curious silence fell between the two. "Will you come out on the balcony and talk to me, Joy?" asked Jessop, at last, in a low tone.

"That I may not do without Tante's permission," returned Joy; "and I much doubt if she will approve of such a thing."

They looked at each other, and both smiled a little ruefully. The thread of their love seemed difficult to pick up again. Where the stitch had been dropped, and how, neither could say. There was no spontaneity, no warmth of feeling. There was even no vivacity of disappointment in Joyce; she felt only a pained surprise. He had embodied for her once all the charm of such a scene as this. He had been her first glimpse into a world where beauty counted.

Back in the old life, when she had dressed his hair and wondered at his magnificence, nothing could have seemed to Joyce nearer paradise than to be at a ball with her fairy prince. Now she was transformed into a fairy princess, the prince beside her, fairyland about her, and in her bosom a heart of lead.

But when a woman's heart begins to drag, she always turns to jesting. "If you are bold enough to face a chaperone, Master Jessop," she said, "I will accompany you and attend to the reserve guns, as I have done before. We can but ask my aunt and be refused."

Wondering much, for a woman is never so completely a puzzle to a man as when she is herself doubtful of her own feelings, Jessop conducted Joy to her aunt.

So marked a figure as his had not failed to attract the attention of that watchful lady. Turning to Colonel Burr, who now stood beside her in conversation with Madeleine, she asked, "Did not the cavalier in white come in with you, monsieur? Who is he? What of him?"

"'T is a Major Jessop," returned Burr, "late of the

English army, cadet of a noble house, rather a wild fellow, I fear, but not worse than another."

Jessop being presented, and the permission asked, madame shook her head. "You may take Major Jessop to the supper-room or to the picture salon, but as to balconies—fie, Major Jessop!—I 'm ashamed of you, Joyous. The dew is falling; 't is no time for balconies and such."

Like culprits, the two turned and retraced their steps. "Shall we go to look at the pictures?" inquired Joy, rather wearily.

"I care not for pictures while I have you before me," whispered Jessop. "Which is the quieter place? Where can we talk?"

"Who talks at a ball? If any talk, surely there 's none to listen," she demurred, with a shrug.

"Does that mean that you would not listen to me, or I to you?" inquired Jessop, irritably.

"Nay, I know not," returned Joy, with a repetition of the little shrug. "You might try it and see."

Their unpremeditated footsteps had brought them to one of the entrances of the long banqueting-hall. They stood together and looked down its length. It was very late, and the company at the tables much thinned. The flowers were beginning to wear an air of haggard dejection, a sadness which Joy found echoed in her heart. The centerpieces of the long tables were, in the fashion of the times, enormously tall.

Jessop, with that quick eye for an opportunity which belonged to the gallants of his world, saw the possibilities of one of those great masses of ferns and flowers for screening. Beckoning to a servant, he suggested that the demoiselle and he would sit where an opening toward the court gave coolness. A skilfully used coin in the man's palm, a hint as to the moving of some monster flower-pots, and before she realized it, Joy

found herself shut in a little bower of greenery, the great epergne flanking one side and cutting them quite off from the rest of the table.

Jessop seated himself close beside her. With the difficulty of approach, his ardor had momentarily rallied. "Sweetheart, how beautiful you are!" he murmured feverishly. "'T is the torture of Tantalus to see those lips so near me, so enticing, all my own, and not be able to touch them."

That words like those left Joy cold was no matter for surprise. However light and jesting his manner, in the old days he had certainly never addressed her thus. "Will—will you not have some supper?" she asked, inwardly recoiling. "Tante will be distressed if I am not a good hostess."

"How can you talk to me of such things? Let us, for these few moments, speak only of each other and our love." Upon the chair behind her shoulders she felt the light touch of his arm.

The possibility of anything like a caress in so public a place shocked and frightened her. Celeste was passing up the steps from the court below; Joy put out her hand and caught the flying edges of an apron. "Celeste," she appealed, "wait here behind my chair. I have a message I desire to send presently to Tante."

Celeste parted her lips to say that she was on an errand and would send some one else, but those large, clear eyes of hers, which saw and comprehended so many things they were not supposed to see, perceived the situation. Without a word, she dropped her brown hands on the back of Joy's chair, and stood immovable. Her fingers were almost against the white satin sleeve, which stirred slightly and was then withdrawn.

Leaning forward where he sat, Jessop could look into the entrance-hall. He observed that Colonel Burr was taking his departure. After trifling for a few mo-

ments with the dishes and wines which had been set before him, so that time enough might elapse to make the errand one impossible of accomplishment, he remarked, as though the idea had just occurred to him: "I would that Colonel Burr were here. He hath some later news of Natchez which would, methinks, interest you. He may be leaving anon. May I send the maid to seek him?"

Against her fingers Celeste felt the pressure of a coin, though Jessop did not turn his head, but kept his eyes fixed on Joy's painfully blushing face.

"Can we not go to him—you and I?" she asked, in a hesitating undertone.

"Why, look you," said Jessop; "a moment gone you were anxious to feed me. And now, when I have but begun my supper, you would hurry me away. Methinks Madame Valentine might well chide, if 't is thus you starve her guests," and he laughed lightly.

The brown fingers did not close, but let the coin fall ringing to the floor.

Jessop turned one furious glance upon the negress, then addressed himself once more to Joy. As a last shift, he called upon the secret which had lain untouched, a sweet bond between them, since the night when her sympathy, stirred by his weakness, had overflowed to him in that kiss which he had always held to be believed a revelation of love.

"Dearest," he said, bending close to her, ignoring Celeste's presence, "do you remember—dare you remember—the time when you loved me well enough to lay those sweet lips of yours on mine—yea, without my asking—and give me the kiss—*give* it me—that kiss for which I am now starving? Be merciful, sweetheart! Be once more kind—as kind as you are fair."

Joyce drew back, filled with repugnance. From his

first appearance here, Jessop's attitude had been to her intolerable. Coarse, encroaching, selfish she felt it to be. She had the kindness, the nobility of nature, to believe that this was but a mood—that it would pass, leaving him once more the man she had known at Natchez. But now her only wish was to get away from everybody, to be alone with this new problem which confronted her.

As she rose unsteadily to her feet, hasty steps came down the hall. The screen of palms was pushed aside, and Luis Valentine's dark face looked in. "Ah, here you are!" he exclaimed, glancing sharply from one to the other, his eyes resting finally with approval upon the immovable Celeste. "I have been seeking you everywhere; maman is asking for you. Maman's demoiselles are strictly limited in the time they give each cavalier, Major Jessop, and your *quart d'heure*, according to the maternal clock, is up, I believe. Cousin Joyous, will you permit me, or will the major take you back?"

Joy put her hand upon her cousin's arm with a feeling of intense relief. "I 'll go with you, Cousin Luis, please—if I may be excused?" She bowed slightly to Jessop.

"Have you been presented to maman?" asked the captain, recollecting, in his satisfaction, to be mannerly. "She was dancing when we came in, I remember. May I present you now?"

Jessop explained that he had met madame, but promised to attend later upon his hostess.

"Who built your bower, sweet cousin?" Luis inquired, as soon as they were out of earshot. "'T was a fine one for playing Corydon and Phyllis, methinks."

Joy plucked up spirit to say that she believed a number of the negroes did the decorating; she could scarce say which one placed the palms.

"Fie, Cousin Joyous, you know well my meaning! You had no need of rouge, I warrant me, when I poked my rash, intruding nose into your paradise."

As Joy gained her aunt's side, that matron said to Luis anxiously: "Where is the man? Hath he gone without returning her to me? That looks as though 't were all true." To Joyce she added, in an undertone: "The gentleman with whom you were, petite, is, we find, a married man. 'T is an unsavory marriage—one he scarce acknowledges; and so, like a good old hen, I desired to cluck to my chick and have her beneath my own wing. Ah, you young demoiselles have to learn that there are many hawks about."

The solid earth seemed to slip from under Joy's feet —those happy feet which had danced so lightly but an hour agone. That terror which is felt to the full only by a creature who is young and who, unfortunate, has been born a woman, laid its clammy clutch upon her heart. Fearing to fall should she attempt to stand, she sat perfectly silent, with down-bent head, till she had a little recovered herself.

Luis, behind her shoulder, was whispering to her: "Ah, Joyous, tell me something hard, something difficult and dreadful which I may do to prove my love for you. You laugh at me and call me a trifler; put me to the test."

At first the words went past Joy's consciousness as though they were not said. By and by came the thought of David. It seemed to her that, in the vast shifting sea of misery in which she felt herself submerged, he would be something steadfast to lay hold upon. "Cousin Luis," she asked finally, "would you find the gentleman who came in with you and Colonel Burr but now—Master David Batchelor? I have somewhat to say to him. I would send a message to my father."

Luis's fine eyes clouded. "You set me a hard task," he protested, "when you send me for another upon whom you would smile instead of your poor slave. But your lightest wish, my Joyous, has only to be breathed. I go at once; I fly to execute it."

Captain Valentine's search was vain. To one of the quaint, cage-like balconies which had been forbidden Joy and her lover, Jessop had brought David. To this calm strength the weakling appealed instantly when his own efforts failed to compass the thing he desired.

Jessop's resplendent figure, in its court trappings, stood glorified outside the lighted window. A fountain splashed with soft, lapsing rhythm into the stone basin underneath, and mirrored starry blossoms floating like flower ghosts in the wan light. A small breeze, heralding the hour before dawn, whipped the sultry air and sent a shiver through the orange and myrtle boughs of this old Creole garden, shaking out great cascades of fragrance to drown the night. He stood there in his shining satin, exhibiting the peevish anger of a child, while the other faced him patiently. And the smaller man's ire rose under Batchelor's silent waiting.

"'T is for this fool's play you made your plans, Master Batchelor!" flung out Jessop. "Methinks my debt to you is over large, and if 't is not paid in quite the coin you counted on, why then that comes of meddling in the concerns of those who could right well dispense with such unwarranted intrusion."

The man addressed looked down on the elegant, ineffectual figure, and the calm which Jessop had found irritating was broken by a merely suggested smile. "How now, Master Jessop—or shall I say, under this different sun, 'your lordship'?—hast fault to find, and a scapegoat here at hand?"

Jessop's anger blazed at the cool, half-jesting words. "Fault? Have I fault to find? You know right well

I have ground of complaint. You knew, when you proposed this scheme, how 't would end. 'T was finely plotted, Master Batchelor, and e'en pious, godly Pastor Valentine himself was ready to send his Methody dove out after a better dowered mate."

The clear eyes watching Jessop hardened, but Batchelor, controlling his disgust, replied: "Master Jessop, your world and mine are far apart. You are nobleman—born!" Jessop flinched as from a blow. "It e'en may be the way with—noblemen, to impugn their benefactors. For myself I care naught—I owe you neither regard nor explanation; but Pastor Valentine's name you must let be, or speak it with that respect owing him by you, of all men. As to your charges against me—what are they, sir? What intrusion has been in your concerns—I take it you cite your own concerns, Master Jessop?"

"Was 't not you who brought Mistress Joy to this accursed hole to take part in all this junketing? And now, forsooth, she 's got her little Methody head turned."

"Was 't intrusion, sir? Who came to me for advisement, Master Jessop? I gave it, mayhap too freely." His lips straightened, and he looked off to the lightening east. "But 't was you would have it. You desired to take this unworldly maid from her primitive life and plunge her into such a maelstrom as that"—pointing back where the music still wailed, the dancers still whirled and curtsied. "You would have plunged her there when 't was too late to put her to the test."

"Test!" broke in Jessop, irritably. "That solemn cant, again! And there comes in the Methody probation. Faith, life brings its tests soon enough, without pushing out to meet them."

A ring of genuine feeling in the sharp tones softened David's heart somewhat; but, despite himself, a certain

scorn rang in his voice as he answered: "Man, man—wouldst take a woman blindfold? For me, not though my soul craved her till it sickened, would I have her untried. She should come to me of her own wish, having sounded the deeps within her, and knowing that where I am there only she belongs." His voice shook with a passion which Jessop had never guessed, and at which he wondered with a vague uneasiness.

Ere the other could speak, Batchelor went on: "What I did was not for you, though I wish you well. 'T was for Pastor Valentine and his daughter. And now, since you speak of intrusion, how is 't I find you here in this city, the mere mention of which I well remember displeased you, Master Jessop? 'T was agreed that you return to Natchez in the coming summer for a settlement with Mistress Joy. What changed your plans? 'T is what well might be called in you intrusion to present yourself thus unheralded."

"And what, pray, of Master Batchelor? He is free to go and come as pleaseth him. Only my unworthy self is to be thus held to account. Is 't not so?"

At his words Batchelor's eyes darkened, and a flush rose in his tanned face; but, without resentment, he made answer, "A very proper query, Master Jessop, to come from you; but the conditions are unlike, as you must yourself admit. I am here to prosecute the business you know of—that pertaining to the Mississippi levees. Colonel Burr urged my presence at this ball, to absent myself from which would have seemed rudeness, and I am here." Then, smiling more genially, "Now for your altered plans, Master Jessop—what of them?"

Jessop made explanation, with an uneasy halting that caused the other's eyes to narrow in earnest scrutiny as they rested on his scowling face. "Faith, 't is

not so monstrous that a man change his mind. Mistress Joy was but to stay a matter of weeks, and here 't is months! I thought her gone from New Orleans. I—I—have friends here—there were matters. I—" He stopped, with a mocking laugh. "Forsooth, friend David, love needs no apology. 'T was but natural, methinks, to follow the lady of my choice."

"Aye," agreed David, dryly, "even when you supposed her some hundreds of miles away."

Jessop's face was black, but, remembering all this man's patience and helpfulness toward him in former straits, he put out his hand and said very winningly: "Let be, Master Batchelor; I crave your pardon. Mistress Joy's mood to-night is not engaging, and I would ask of you once more—"

Batchelor interrupted decidedly: "The pardon is granted for your asking, Master Jessop; there is my hand upon it. But for the balance, it must rest with you and Pastor Valentine and Mistress Joyce herself. My very good will is yours, but my advisement I will e'en keep to myself."

To this resolution he held, though Jessop fumed and swore, and went far toward losing even the kindly good will Batchelor had promised. And, since he petulantly refused to join David when he went to make his adieus, Jessop left without seeking his hostess at all, cursing the evil star which had led him to New Orleans, to this ball, and to this interview with Batchelor.

CHAPTER XXIV

S the leaden moments passed, and Luis did not return, Joy's sufferings became intolerable. Finally Tante, remarking her distress, whispered softly: "What is it, Joyette? Why, where are all the roses gone? You are white as my handkerchief, child; are you ill?"

"I feel not well," faltered Joy. "I—if I might go—"

"And lie down," supplied Madame Valentine. "So you shall, little one." To the footman behind her chair, she said sharply, below her breath, "Briq, bring Celeste to me." And when her order had been obeyed she gave the negress explicit directions as to a cordial which was to be administered, and bade Joy go with her.

Even in the preoccupation of her misery, Joy noted the perfect poise with which Madame Valentine managed this little by-play, giving her orders in a rapid aside, never losing the amiable smile of the hostess while receiving the devoirs and compliments of her departing guests.

Madeleine and Ausite were yet dancing, although the rooms were thinning fast, the duke having just retired. Once outside in the hallway, Joy turned back to Celeste and said: "Nay, I 'm not ill. Pray give me no cordial. I only want to be in the open air alone."

"Oui, mamselle," agreed the patient, gentle-voiced Celeste, believing that she understood, and full of quick sympathy. She led Joyce, silently and without attracting unnecessary attention, through a cross-hall out upon a small iron-railed balcony, whence a flight of steps led directly into the grounds.

Joy stood quite still in the sweet, odorous dusk of the garden. Through the interlacing branches of a mimosa she looked at the patient stars. Those same stars were shining now on the river and the bluff and Father Toby's little cabin against the cane-brake; and at the thought the first sob of her misery broke from her.

The desire to leave it all, to walk out of this house, and on and on in the cool, pitying, friendly dark till she came to her father's cabin grew uncontrollable. She went hesitatingly across the little grassy yard to a gate.

"O mamselle, mamselle, your dress!" remonstrated Celeste's plaintive voice behind her, as the silken folds trailed through drenching dew.

" 'T is no matter," returned Joy, absently; "I shall never wear it again." The negress caught up the flowing skirt, with its great garlands of embroidery, and laid it about the girl's bare shoulders. Such ruthless havoc shocked her.

Joy opened the gate and stepped out upon the banquette. Too desperately engrossed with her own sufferings to note whither she was going, she turned instinctively to where the dawn wrought pallidly upon the eastern sky. It was not yet daybreak, but the spires of the cathedral down past the corner, where she had gone with her cousins to confession, were like beckoning fingers against the half light. Her whole world had at this one touch jarred, shaken, and fallen in ruins about her. If Jessop were this thing he seemed, who, then, was true? Was all love such a ghastly mockery?

Might any one whom you dared trust be found in the end to be a liar—a cheat?

Back of these questionings rioted the tumult of a suffering which was almost physical—a revolt at thought of her intimacy, her loving companionship with this man. He had kissed her—nay, she had kissed him—she, Joyce Valentine! He had been a part of her home life, hers and her upright, confiding, gentle old father's, for weeks—months. Recalling all the daily familiarities of that life, she shuddered, she shrank as from pollution, and walked on the faster.

The habit of Joy's life had been prayer. Now she raised her face and tried to pray. The stars were obscured by a sudden drift of cloud. Out from a tattered rift looked wanly a waning moon which illumined nothing. The first big drops of a shower pattered on the pavement. Joy's prayer would not come. It lingered somewhere back in her consciousness, and she longed only for her earthly father's arms around her, and his broad, loving breast to lay her shamed head upon.

She had been walking very fast, had turned sharply into Chartres Street, and Celeste, panting after, saw with satisfaction the wide portal and welcome light of the cathedral just ahead. No doubt the poor demoiselle had been imprudent, and Madame Valentine had reproved her. Now she was coming to make her petition in the church.

Joy stood a moment, fascinated, before the open door. Its silent invitation always touched her fancy. It was to her like a reaching hand, the outstretched arms of divine love. She wished dumbly that it had been her own meeting-house door so open to her, and then she realized that troubles such as hers could not be carried to that meeting-house. There was no place for them.

The negress laid a gentle, constraining hand upon her shoulder, and pushed her softly toward the portal. "Mamselle's poor little pretty shoes," she whispered caressingly.

Joy dropped her gathered skirts from about her shoulders, and stood, a gleaming figure, in the half light. She put out one white, scarlet-heeled slipper, sadly soiled and stained now. "What matter for the shoes, either?" she asked. "I shall never dance again, nor care to go to balls any more. Why should I keep them?"

As the edges of her skirts trailed upon the muddy pavement, Celeste said, in actual pain: "It will be ruined, mamselle." But Joy did not hear. With uplifted face and unseeing eyes, she let the rain, which increased every moment, beat upon her uncovered head and bare, white neck. The gracious coolness of it was sweet to her fevered, thirsting soul.

Then, with the bright drops gemming all her hair, she turned and walked slowly, as in a dream, into the church.

At the altar a priest knelt in prayer.

As Joy hesitated toward one of the confessionals, he finished his devotions and rose. Her hand was on the curtain when he approached and accosted her.

So wildly strange a figure as she made there, in her ball-gown with the rain upon her hair, might well have moved to curiosity, but he spoke as to the most usual of penitents. "Do you desire to confess, my daughter?" he asked quietly. Then, as Joy bent her head and drew the curtain further back, "There is none within to hear you now."

"No one to hear me?" cried Joy, in anguish. "There is no one to hear me, I know."

"I will go in," the gentle voice of the priest went on, "if you desire it."

"I am not a Catholic," burst out Joy, abruptly. "I was brought up to become a Methodist preacher—a preacher of the Word. But I am in sore trouble—yea, the blackness of darkness hath encompassed me, and I cannot see God's face at all. I cannot find his providence in anything that hath happened. Will you listen to me? Do you think you might help me?"

"Surely, my child," replied the priest, "I will listen. As for help, that comes in time of trouble from higher than human sources. Perchance I can aid you to ask for it aright, so that it may be given you."

Joyce scarcely heeded him. Too preoccupied to loose it, she stood with the curtain of the confessional still in her hand, her eyes strained and unseeing, her smooth, young face white, affrayed, convulsed. In sentences halting, hurrying, in a voice none had ever heard before—a voice unconscious almost as the voice of madness, now sharp and agonized, now choked by mangling sobs—she poured out the whole of her story.

The forms of living, the customary dignities of adulthood, fell away. Tears burst from her, and streamed unregarded down to mingle with the rain which soaked her shining broideries.

There was much that the priest in no wise comprehended; but he asked no questions. The tale of youth's disillusionment, the conflict between spiritual and worldly longings through which some souls must of necessity go, these were to him old stories which called for no exactness in the telling, nor needed explanations. When the passionate, broken young voice had made an end there was silence for a time. Then the priest said softly: "I will pray for you, my daughter; not here nor now, but later."

A month before, Joyce would have thought Papist prayers scarce desirable, that to accept them might even be sinful. But the thought of being carried to the

throne of grace, borne as a child in the arms of another, came to her here sweet and comforting.

"And you would wish me to advise you—to tell you what it is that you should do?" he inquired kindly.

Joy had not consciously desired this; she had only longed overwhelmingly to unburden her heart, but she bent her head in assent.

"I think, my daughter, that your safest earthly refuge is with your father. Go to him at once, tell him all that you have told me; and when you are at peace with him, methinks you will not seek God in vain."

At mention of Father Toby, the remembrance, which had somehow seemed obscured, that he and the old home remained hers still, that it was only the things of this new life which had failed her, brought a sudden lightening of Joy's spirits.

Thanking the priest, she would have turned to go, but Celeste, who had been praying at the altar, whispered to her to kneel; and as both women bent before him, the old man spread his hands above Joy's heretic head and blessed her in sonorous Latin.

Closely attended by Celeste, Joy took her way back over the wet, shining pavements. The primrose lights of dawn were clear behind the old cathedral toward the east. The shower was past; Joy's spirit was inexpressibly comforted.

"Belike," she said to herself, "this thing which hurts me now so cruelly is a summer thunder-shower too. And when I go back to the old life, mayhap I shall step forth into the light again."

CHAPTER XXV

OY'S shrinking eyes opened unwillingly to the morning light. With the surprise which the young always feel to find that, however the heart be torn, the processes of nature, the eating, the drinking, and the sleeping, still go on, she discovered that she had slept till ten o'clock.

Zette was in the room, sitting, or squatting, near the foot of her couch, plying a monster fan. She smiled delightedly when Joy awoke, and said: "Momzelle has slept like one baybee. Oh, how sweetly momzelle has slept! All the gentlemen who were at the ball last night have broken hearts to-day because of my momzelle, and here she lies and sleeps!"

Joy had won Zette's adoration without trying to do so. That milk-white skin of hers, her ruddy-gold hair were claims enough upon the dusky damsel's reverential love. "Would that I might sleep forever," she murmured wearily, more to herself than to Zette.

"Ah, wicked, wicked Joyous!" called a laughing voice from the doorway. "You desire to be the Sleeping Beauty only that all the good knights may be slain outside your castle wall, till a fairy prince comes to wake you with a kiss." Madeleine whirled in, all in a cloud of filmy white, sailed over to the bedside, and kissed her cousin. "I know I am a good girl," she said. "I think I am a saint, not to hate you for last night."

Joy's recollections of how and by whom she had been put to bed were very hazy, and she looked about apprehensively lest her ruined ball-gown should disclose the secret of last night's excursion. But it was Celeste who had assisted the waiting Zette to cleanse and put away all the paraphernalia of the ball, and there was nothing left to betray poor Joy. Her snowy négligée and slippers were laid ready, and the room was set in its usual faultless order.

"What shall you wear to the theater to-night, Joyous?" demanded Madeleine.

"Must I go?" Joy almost groaned. Then, realizing the ungraciousness of the question, she added, "Will Tante desire it? Is it necessary, do you think?"

"Necessary! Listen to the little hypocrite!" cried Madeleine. "Ausite," she called, as her sister flitted past the door, "here 's Joyous fishing for compliments. She would have us to say how proud we are of the conquest she made of the duke."

Ausite swam into the room with all sails set, like a little ship of war, and, to continue the simile, bombarded Joy with a broadside of kisses and admiring exclamations. Of course she must go; maman would be désolée. The prince was to sail for Spain on the morrow. He must have every caprice gratified.

Joy found, with a repugnance which she sought to stifle as unworthy and unkind, that her importance in the eyes of these young relatives was very considerably augmented by the attentions she had received from royalty. Her sick soul loathed it all. She felt no emotion save a weary craving to be at home in her father's house, and yet these relatives had been kind to her, in their own way, which was not her way, they loved her. And she obediently donned the dress she was told to assume, and accompanied the royal party to the theater.

The one theater in the New Orleans of that day was small, but served amply for the size of the city. It consisted of a horseshoe of boxes, with an amphitheater in the center raised above the pit; above the horseshoe was a gallery.

The plays were performed in French, and the acting was creditable. The music accompanying the plays was invariably amateur, as we should now say, being furnished by some of the most distinguished gentlemen in the city. There was none other to be obtained, and it was frequently the most excellent feature of the performance. On this occasion, in honor of the exiled Bourbon, everything had been arranged with especial care. The theater was in gala attire, its boxes draped in the colors of France, gay with scarfs and knots and rosettes.

Two boxes thrown into one, the arms of the Bourbons blazoned upon them, had been set apart for the prince and his friends. Everywhere the Bourbon lilies spoke in a universal tongue to these volatile, emotional Frenchmen.

Filled with the most elegant men and beautiful women of New Orleans and Paris, in their satins and jewels and laces, with powdered hair and patches and paint and shining eyes, rarely has a modern play-house presented a more dazzling setting even for royalty itself.

As Joy placed herself behind Tante's ample shoulders—a Creole demoiselle of the day was not put upon display in public places—she looked, in spite of the dull heartache which underlay her every thought, with some interest at the brilliant scene before her. Nowhere in the New World could have been found anything so nearly resembling the Paris of that day. Full dress was the rule, and men vied with women in the brilliance and beauty of their costumes. The entry

of the duke was the signal for a wild burst of applause. He bowed smilingly. But again and again the cheers burst forth, handkerchiefs were waved, and kisses were thrown to him in answer to his own repeated salutes.

This feeling of the exiled royalists for the exiled scion of their royal house had in it something touching which, although she was quite ignorant of such matters and had been brought up to regard courts and kings as among the lures of the flesh, Joy could not fail to appreciate. Leaning around Tante's shoulder, she glanced up at the blithe, gallant young gentleman who stood for so much to these cheering people, and her eyes filled with tears.

The play was a French classic. The theater was no longer new to Joy, and, with her heart so full of its own tragedy, the painted scene, the mimic passion could not hold her attention for a moment. Safe back in her obscurity, she drooped her weary head and tried to think. She had already told her uncle's family that she must go home at once. Her Uncle Henri found that a keel-boat was going up the river on the morrow. Tante Ausite, who thought it inexpressibly shocking that a demoiselle should make such a trip alone, was sending Zette with her. Zette was a present from this affectionate aunt to the niece of whom she was both fond and proud. The negress was in a transport of delight at thought of going with and belonging to an adored young mistress. She had packed away most of the pretty dresses and quantities of little trinkets and keepsakes. Dear little baubles they were, brought and given, with the fondest caresses and tears, to sweet cousin Joyous by the members of the big, loving, enthusiastic household. A certain peace came to Joy—partly it was the peace of weariness and partly the serenity of an unalterable resolution—as she consid-

ered these preparations and hugged the thought of being at home once more.

In the midst of her musings, the curtain descended. There was a stirring in the audience, and with the bursting forth of orchestral music came also a hum of conversation. Joy raised her head and began glancing idly about at the people in the theater.

Across from her, almost opposite, sat a very beautiful woman. The girl's eyes singled her out because she appeared to be alone, and because of a certain defiant hardihood in her bearing. But as Joy regarded her, she became aware that the woman was not alone; her escort merely sat where he was screened behind the sheltering curtains. Something in the curve of his arm, the white hand, half hid in its lace ruffle, that he had laid upon the box-ledge, was familiar. As Joy looked, the woman turned and addressed him. He bent forward, and showed the face of Jessop.

Again, as at the ball last night, Joy felt that qualm of deadly sickness come over her. She feared that she should faint; but, though she drew back quite in the shadow, and pushed the curtain so that it might shield her more, her eyes never left Jessop's face.

He was laughing as he talked, but not pleasantly nor kindly. Something in her fixed gaze must have drawn his, for he turned toward the royal box and scrutinized the duke's party. Lifting a lorgnette from the woman's lap, he raised it to his eyes and looked again.

Joy had no doubt that he was searching for her. She had told him, when he asked her at the ball the night before, that she should not attend the theater with the Valentines. Now, as she almost crouched there, horrified and shuddering, the duke bent forward and, concluding some remark in regard to Natchez and the entertainments there, said: "Is it not so, Mademoiselle Valentine?"

A sudden revulsion of feeling swept over Joy. Why was it, she asked in her soul, as many a woman has asked before and many will do after her, that a man can do shamelessly, boldly, things at which a woman looking on, his victim only, must blush and shrink and tremble?

The intrepid spirit of old returned to her. Up came her regal little head, and the color flashed into her pale cheeks. She answered the duke merrily, averring that her time was so taken up, dressing the hair of gallants who were to adorn the ball at Natchez that she had no time to attend the festivities. "Monseigneur," she concluded, "you may have forgotten that I had not then learned to dance. What should a demoiselle who could not dance do at a ball?"

"Break hearts, an she be Mistress Joyce Valentine," rejoined the duke, gallantly.

When Jessop's glass focussed upon Joy's laughing, brilliant face he lowered it with an oath. "I thought she spoke truth, but they'll all lie, damn them!" he said.

His glance traveled to the duke. "Higher game," he sneered.

Madame, a woman used to the instant reading of faces and events, noted his agitation, caught up the glass, and for herself examined into the cause of it.

Jessop half rose, sat down, trifled a moment uneasily with some tablets which he drew from his pocket, and then, putting them aside, took out a slip of paper and began to write.

Madame's hard eyes never left him as he wrote, and her busy, quick brain was scheming. The note written and folded, he called one of the liveried negro attachés of the theater, and, with a fee, gave directions that the billet be slipped unnoticed into the hand of the lady whom he indicated.

Joy felt the touch upon her arm, and Zette—the wait-

ing-woman of that time was used to such errands—pushed the folded paper into her mistress's fingers.

Some instinct told her what the note was. The curtain was up again. The players were upon the stage. Joy's eyes noted their movements calmly, as she sat apparently watching the scene with pleased interest, while Jessop's note lay unread.

The Joyce of last night—the stormy, tumultuous, battling Joyce—was to the Joyce of this evening what a blazing prairie is to that same plain when the flames have gone over it, leaving it a blackened waste.

Since her first recoil at sight of Jessop and the woman whom she believed to be his wife, she felt no more shame nor fear, not even disgust. Anger was dead in her. She was conscious only of a dull wish not to read his note.

Finally, with a feeling more of weariness than aught else, she drew out the paper, glanced over it, and read:

"Are you gone up too High to look down even, upon Those to whom you once Belonged? That you are mine, remember. I am not a Man who gives up his own to Another. I must see you. Where will you meet me? JESSOP."

She folded the note with great precision. Jessop's hungry, imperious eyes were on her face. Through his glass he watched her every turn of expression as she tore the paper slowly through, once, twice, three times, then from her hand let it drop absently, a little shower of fluttering snow.

She never looked his way again, and his efforts to gain access to her were fruitless. Joy could not herself have told whether the sight of Jessop and the woman added to her weary distaste of this life or no. But for some reason she found it possible, after that, to put him more completely out of her thoughts.

CHAPTER XXVI

AFTER the theater, in the great dining-hall of the Valentine mansion, there was a late supper for the duke, at which he took his formal farewell of the men of New Orleans who had been foremost in doing him honor.

When Orléans and his suite had retired, and the guests were departing, Luis Valentine signed to a group of intimates, and, after he had speeded the others, invited these chosen ones to a little smoking-room on the floor above.

There they now sat, drinking deeper than was good for their wits, and playing higher than was good for their purses. A gray-haired, red-faced Irishman, Captain O'Neil, a bold, ruffling blade, with the fire of youth and the duplicity of his years, was leading the play along routes profitable to him. The room was, despite its open windows, blue with smoke. Luis had been losing heavily to O'Neil, and had, as a natural consequence, applied himself to the specious consolation of the wine-bottle.

It was the hour and the situation for a brawl, when the door opened and Neville stepped into the room. Luis raised his head with an oath. Since the day on the lake there had been at best an armed truce between the brothers, and at worst a series of skirmishes.

A few days before the ball Captain Valentine had spoken to the commander of Neville's company—a very

proud little band of boy soldiers, independents, state troops, militia—and suggested that his own comfort would be ministered to by sending the boy on a sort of scouting expedition that would keep him out of New Orleans till the festivities were over.

The youthful captain, jealous of respect, was flattered by the older man's familiar approach, and so, amid much laughter, the errand was invented.

Luis had not met Neville for two days, and the sight of him now was an exasperation. "Go to bed, little boy," he cried, returning to that first taunt which so maddened the younger.

Neville was well aware of the treachery which had cost him the ball, and thereby a promised dance with Joyce. Tall as any man in the room, his seraph's face strangely out of place in that half-drunken company, he came on toward the table and sat down. "May I join you, Captain O'Neil? Will you deal me cards?" he asked, openly ignoring his brother.

O'Neil had no mind that the play should be hampered by the presence of a moneyless boy who, as he conceived, might at any time turn informer. He dropped his eyes to the bits of pasteboard before him. "Captain Valentine is my host, sir," he answered finally—"and yours, if you would join this company."

Neville, instead of flushing, went white. O'Neil, who was watching his face, counted it an evil sign. It was the day of the duello. The sword which hung at each gentleman's side was not there merely for ornament. O'Neil himself was a man of undoubted bravery and a noted duelist, but one of whom it was well known that he would fight upon the most immaterial provocation—or none—to gain ends other than honorable.

Colonel Burr, the only man present who did not belong to Luis's intimate circle, rose and suggested de-

parture. "We have overstayed, gentlemen," he said. "In the charm of Captain Valentine's hospitality, we have quite lost count of the hours."

But the word of this new friend, who had already gained with Luis something of his usual influence, was powerless to stay the rising tumult. "Sit down, Colonel Burr," he growled, catching at the other's wrist. "I promised this brat a thrashing months agone, and 't is in my mind to give it him. Sit down, sir, and behold an example of family discipline."

Neville rose, tall and pale. "Gentlemen," he cried, "I am without a sword. Will one of you accommodate me?"

He turned instinctively toward that voice in which he had heard kindness; but Burr shook his head smilingly and dropped a hand on Luis's shoulder, holding him forcibly, that he might not rise.

O'Neil was up in a moment, whipped to the door, and locked it, crying over his shoulder: "Here 's a blade for you, you young divil, once I get the dure locked!"

At the word "sword" and at sight of the Irishman locking the door, Luis's face changed.

"Captain Valentine, this is your brother," remonstrated Burr.

"The more reason he should be made to smart for 't," boomed O'Neil's big tones from the doorway, where he was unloosing his weapon. "I 've a bit of a brother in O'Neil Castle, and if he bruk in on company of mine with 'is impudence, 't is I would never touch him with hand, but I 'd tache him with steel."

"Keep your weapon, Captain O'Neil," called Luis. "No need for steel to teach a cub like this."

The other men present had so far held themselves strictly neutral, according to the code of honor in that day. To one of these—his cousin, a young French-

man, Camille Decloussis—Neville now made his appeal for a sword, and was almost passionately refused.

"If he touch me," said Neville, through his teeth—"if he dare lay finger on me, I shall kill him—I have borne enough!"

A young Spanish lieutenant, Ignacio Flores, had unloosed and was now tendering his blade.

The boy accepted the weapon, and backed toward the wall. He was a good swordsman, better perhaps than his brother, but at his years the hardness of muscle requisite for much staying power was not possible.

"I will not be struck," he panted. "I will not be degraded. I will have the treatment of a gentleman."

"Have it, then," snarled Luis, past all bounds.

Code or no code, Decloussis, a relative, could bear the pressure no longer. "You said you meant to thrash him, Luis," he burst out. "For God's sake put up the swords—put up the swords! Oh, my God!" as Luis's blade flashed from the scabbard. "Will nobody stop them?" and he dropped his head on the table among the cards and sobbed.

His neighbor, Flores, looked at him contemptuously. Both were Latins, but the sterner mold of the Spanish character only hardened before the ghastliness of the situation.

Neville stood at bay. Those about the table held back from him, as men do hold back from one in extremity, fearing to be involved in his downfall.

The boy's large, fawn-like eyes roved from side to side of the company. "I have no second, gentlemen," he repeated again and yet again, in a tone which began to be piteous. "Is nobody with me? Colonel Burr, do I fight alone?"

Burr had from the first made a strong effort to take the matter lightly, to assume toward it his habitual attitude of command. But as he remonstrated with

the maddened elder brother and contemplated the touching figure of the younger, a look of horror settled upon his face. The hatefulness of the position thrust upon him—that of impotent onlooker or participator in the unnatural tragedy—was appallingly clear to him.

"I cannot assist you, M. Valentine," he answered shortly. "Gentlemen, I refuse to be present. I bid you good evening. As Captain O'Neil holds the door, I shall make here my exit."

He turned swiftly to the open window, and stepped out upon the balcony. Behind him rose a storm of oaths and cries. The adversaries, united in a common dismay, rushed pell-mell toward the window, and, jamming in that narrow opening, gave Burr a moment of grace. He glanced coolly about the little iron-railed gallery. It crossed the window of another room, but that window was shut. Without hesitation, he mounted the railing, swung himself lightly over, and, finding footing in a riot of vines, dropped easily to a balcony below. Behind him was the lamp-lit room, hazy with smoke, foul with the stale odor of wine, its half-tipsy occupants bent upon doing or seeing murder. Outside, there was the pallid hint of dawn, and the dawn's chill breath struck cool upon the fever of that scene.

It needed not this tonic air, however, to steady Aaron Burr's purpose. At the risk of something dear to a man of his temper, facing the chance that he might be branded a coward in that he had infringed the code of honor, he was going for help.

The gallery upon which he had dropped was a long one. Tearing himself free from the vines, carrying unconsciously a great, blossoming streamer on his arm, he hurried its length past the windows, seeking a door or stairway.

He was brought to sudden halt by a face at one of

the casements. Joy, unable to sleep, had sent Zette away; now she sat, fully dressed, looking out into the night.

"Mistress Joy!" cried Burr.

"Colonel Burr! What is it?" came the swift response.

"'T is murder being done in the room above," returned Burr. "Your uncle—where can I find him? Quick, Mistress Joy!"

"My cousins?" inquired the girl. "Luis—has—Take me to them."

"You cannot go as I came," whispered Burr, "and they have the door locked."

"This way," breathed Joy. She stepped without, leading him through a door and toward a stairway. "The room next Luis's, is it not?" she whispered, as they ran hand in hand through the dark hall. "Did Luis strike the boy?"

"'T is that accursed thing they call a duel," answered Burr; "that devil's code which counsels a man to barter, for a perverted honor, his peace of mind, his very hopes of heaven."

Burr's confidence in the girl's quick wit was reinforced by a belief that she was herself the real subject of quarrel between the brothers, and would be, therefore, the one most suitable to quell the storm.

She led him up the stairs and, through an unoccupied room, to that closed window which gave upon the balcony outside the smoking-room, the window which Burr had passed—finding it fastened—as he hastened for help. Through it they stepped onto the balcony, and came quickly and silently to the window of the smoking-room itself. The men had not thought it worth while to barricade this entrance, but had rather turned to get the affair over, if they might, before interference should arrive.

Decloussis still sat, his head upon the table. He might have been asleep, except that now and again a start or shudder took him. The Spaniard was seconding Neville, while O'Neil stood beside Luis.

The center of the tiny room was cleared—it was a deadly place for sword-play. Luis was darkly flushed, the light of madness in his eyes.

It appeared that the men had been placed, and a round fought. Burr and Joyce heard the clash of steel as they came up. Then it ceased suddenly, and Luis panted, in a voice half smothered with rage: "I 'll not kill thee, poor, pretty fool—because thou art a Valentine—but I 'll mark that baby face of thine—till she—"

The last word wrought his adversary to fury past bearing. Without waiting for the seconds to give the word to recommence, he cried, in his clear, boyish tones: "On guard!"

The window was latched or bolted; Burr had tried it with his hand. Now he raised his foot and drove it inward with a great clattering of glass.

As the two burst into the room, the men all turned to them with such composure as they could muster, even Decloussis sitting up and disclosing a tear-stained face.

The blades, which had crossed with a shattering clang just after Neville's words, were dropped instantly. Luis came toward them, breathing fast, but smiling. "How now, sweet cousin?" he said. "You have interrupted a bit of practice."

"Luis!" cried Joy, in a voice of anguish. "My cousin—oh, how could you!"

She had run to him and clasped his sword-arm with both shaking hands. He laid possessive fingers over those two small hands, and answered reassuringly: " 'T was but a fencing-bout, and all in the best spirit, *ma cousine.*"

Captain O'Neil, muttering beneath his breath, "The cause of the ruction, by God! Might have known 't was more than cards," slipped stealthily toward the door, that he might, unobserved, turn back the key.

Colonel Burr's eye was upon him, however, and that gentleman heaved a great sigh of relief. If O'Neil was giving up the case, there would be no further trouble.

When the Irishman came forward, full of voluble compliments, desiring to be presented to Mistress Valentine that he might reassure her, Joy turned her back upon him, not unkindly, but rather as though unable either to see or hear till her mind was set at rest.

"Luis," she urged, "promise me. I cannot forget those dreadful words you said on the lake. They haunt me, and make me feel myself a creature of ill omen. Promise me. Neville—" She turned her head.

"My brother will tell you, as I do, Joyous, that 't was only a friendly bout at fencing," Luis interrupted, in a raised, warning tone.

" 'T was naught more," came Neville's voice faintly, from where he stood.

Luis frowned savagely, and bit his lip at the half-hearted acquiescence. But Joy, whose loving eye was quicker than another's, sprang toward Neville, and cried out so sharply that the Spaniard caught the boy as he swayed and went down.

Then his head was in Joy's lap, blood from a wound upon his temple dabbling all her white dress, and Celt and Latin burst into a salvo of outcry and explanations.

Burr alone, of those in the room, retained presence of mind. Dipping his handkerchief in a flower-bowl upon a table, he knelt beside the boy and wiped away the blood to ascertain the extent of injury.

Upon the other side of the prostrate form, Luis was

on his knees, weeping, praying heartbrokenly, publishing to any listener the full extent of his guilt in the matter.

Joy, sick with horror, yet preserved sufficient composure to offer Burr more prospect of assistance than the others.

" 'T is a scratch—a mere scratch," the colonel cried reassuringly. "A small vein hath been cut. Pray, Mistress Valentine, press with your finger here to stay the bleeding till I make a bandage. Gentlemen, give me another handkerchief."

As Burr worked with light, skilled fingers over the wounded youth, poor Luis regained himself somewhat. "Must you go, Captain O'Neil?" he said, rising. "I bid you, then, good night, sir."

The captain, who had been waiting the issue of affairs—in hope, apparently, that, this thing smoothed, another meeting might be arranged and his services still required—took the check with an equal countenance. "Why, then, good night," he said, smiling nonchalantly; "and good night to the beauteous Mistress Valentine, who appears to be skilled in the wounding of hearts and the healing of heads."

The Spaniard went with O'Neil. Decloussis, as a member of the family, remained.

When Neville's wound was bound, his face bathed, and a little wine held to his lips, he roused himself enough to say loyally: " 'T was not Luis's fault. We were fencing, and there came a noise at the window, and his blade slipped." Then, looking up into Joy's tearful face above him, he added, with a child's smile, "And now Luis is envying me my broken head, because sweet Cousin Joyous weeps about it."

When they had helped him to a couch, Burr asked if Madame Valentine should be summoned.

The elder brother, with God knows what devils fight-

ing in his heart, stood at the window, his back to them all. "Why should she, sir?" he answered coldly. "You heard my brother say the thing was an accident, and you yourself have told us that the injury is naught; why should you call my mother?"

Of all the personal griefs which Joy had suffered in this new life of hers, nothing had so shaken her as this; nothing had made her so long to escape. She went to her cousin, and, whispering, asked, "Luis, will you promise me?"

"Nay," he answered fiercely; "that will I not. You will make me no promise."

In her bitter need, she turned unconsciously to the one comfort which had once been daily bread to her, and now seemed almost forgotten. "God help me, what shall I do?" she said.

The simple, humble cry touched her cousin's heart —for the moment, at least. "Joyous," he began, huskily, "I will not promise, but I will tell you that you may trust me without promises. What you fear—I will never do. But such women as you, with your beautiful faces and your cold hearts—" He paused, flung out an impetuous hand, and finished—"Such women as you must e'en be willing to face the natural and inevitable results of the things you do."

Joy's hand fell from her cousin's arm. Had he struck her, she could scarce have felt the blow more acutely. Her sense of rebuff was physical. Was she indeed such a creature as Luis had described?

And her traitor heart answered her then, and gave her lying assurance many times thereafter, when she brooded upon the horrors of that night, that the accusation was just.

CHAPTER XXVII

UIS cut Joyce to the soul by flinching from sight of her, as a monk might flinch from some carnal temptation.

It was the morning after the duel, and the last day of her visit in New Orleans. His great, black eyes—Luis's bold, challenging, passionate eyes—sought the floor. The too ardent glances which she had deprecated were turned aside from her face. His greeting—his farewells, even—were brief, constrained, perfunctory. Joy forgave him with quick generosity when she saw his own countenance seamed and marred by last night's experiences. She could guess from it through what hells of self-abasement he had walked since dawn. For herself, she felt, as do the noblest women, all the shame which should have been his, and before the high tribunal of her own heart was condemned as the thing which his perverted vision had seen her. She loathed, momentarily and unjustly, that beauty which had set the brothers at each other's throats.

Neville was nowhere to be seen, but since Tante did not mention him, Joy timidly forbore to do so, hoping his wound had been accounted for and naught suspected.

Uncle Henri insisted that she go down with him that morning to choose some jewels with which he desired to present her. Madame Valentine objected that

no demoiselle went to shops, but Uncle Henri was firm. Joyce, he said, was not to be bound by the rules applicable to young French demoiselles. She was a visitor to New Orleans, and must see the shops along with other sights. In the end he had his way; the volante was brought around, and Joy, wearing the dress in which she was to travel, was allowed to accompany him. Madeleine and Ausite occupied the front seat, and chattered all the way.

These volatile young cousins were dear to Joy; yet sometimes, as now, their insistent gaiety jarred upon her. The carriage drew up before the door of the principal jeweler's establishment. These little New Orleans shops were dingy as to exterior, but the wares within were as fine as anything to be bought in London or Paris.

As was customary, the jeweler and his assistants came out to them, bringing trays of rings, chains and bracelets for the inspection of the ladies. While Ausite and Madeleine bent over the jewels, absorbed in assisting her selection, and their cousin tried vainly to force into her manner an interest which she did not feel, a pitiful-looking negro girl stole toward the carriage, and, crouching on the curbstone, stared at Joyce.

One of the clerks, turning, touched the child with his foot. "Have a care, 'Sieur Girarde," he warned. "I 'll wager this black imp here is bent on theft."

"I am not," returned Lalla, indignantly. "I was looking at her," and she pointed her little black forefinger at Joyce.

"Well, take yourself off," said M. Girarde. "Cease gaping at the lady and begone."

A porter carrying one of the jewel-trays pushed the child a trifle roughly, and she fell. She sprang up and turned on him like a little fury. "I will look at her—I will! I would rather say my prayers to her

than to Madonna in the church. She knows me. She will not send me away."

The party in the carriage, who had been so absorbed in the choosing of Joy's souvenirs as to let this altercation pass unnoticed, were now attracted by Lalla's raised tones. "What is it?" inquired 'Sieur Valentine. "Did the child snatch one of the rings?"

"No; but I doubt not she is a thief," returned the jeweler. And Lalla, protesting, was being shoved to one side, when Joy's eyes fell upon her.

"Why, 't is the child I saw in the market!" cried she. Her heart smote her because, in the preoccupation of her own sorrows, she had made no effort to trace or help the waif.

At the sound of her voice, Lalla reached up both hands and clung to the side of the volante as a drowning creature might cling to a boat's edge. "How do they know," she half whispered, indicating the jeweler and his assistants with a motion of her head, "that the white devil says I must steal for her?"

"They do not know it," Joy reassured her. "None will hurt you, child."

Then, turning to her uncle, she told him briefly of the meeting with Lalla in the market, and her assertion that she was a free negro and unkindly treated. And she concluded, "Dear Uncle Henri, when I go back to my home, the rules of my Society will not allow me to wear these beautiful things which you desire to give me. Will you not then, instead, allow me to help this poor child? Believe me, 't will be the most welcome gift I could receive."

"Why," said her uncle, "for the matter of that, there 's no reason you should not have them both. As for the rules of your church, they would permit, methinks, that you should eat from silver. Your old uncle may e'en be reduced to filling you a dower-chest

with plate if you may not wear the gewgaws. As for the child, she seems an unpromising brat enough; but if you say you want her, off to the sisters we go, and I will buy her for you."

So much of this as she could understand was communicated to Lalla. The carriage was turned and the convent visited; but the sisters told 'Sieur Valentine that the little negress was indeed ownerless, and had been merely lent Madame along with Zoombi, who was hired there.

The 'sieur drew a long face, whistled a bit, and said to the waiting girls in the carriage; "Now, my lassies, home with you, for papa has an errand upon which he cannot take demoiselles."

Joy inquired eagerly as to the prospect of success in Lalla's case, and when he admitted that he was now going to call upon the woman with whom she was living, she begged to go with him.

At first the 'sieur demurred, then entered into some partial explanations. But when Joy urged that she was not a resident of the town, but merely a sojourner going at once away, and quoted his own arguments used in regard to her seeing the shops, he laughed a little like a naughty school-boy, said, "How horrified your aunt will be!" and ended by sending his daughters home and taking Joyce with him, in a hired carriage. And so they called together upon Madame.

Madame's house was long, low, not imposing in exterior. Inside the furnishings were rich. The little reception-room into which Joyce and her uncle were shown was crowded with unnecessary furniture and ornament, and when Madame herself appeared, overdressed, over-jeweled and overdone in patronizing suavity of manner, the picture of the woman and her life was complete.

'Sieur Valentine did not present his niece, but, ris-

ing, stated his business briefly. Joyce, overwhelmed at unexpected sight of the woman who had sat beside Jessop in the theater box, remained stunned and speechless till her uncle came to that point in his conversation where he announced: "I desire to get possession of the child, that I may give her to my niece here, who hath a fancy for her, though the Lord knows why."

"Your niece," repeated Madame, in her clear, overbearing tones, "Mistress Joyce Valentine?"

This seemed to call for something like an introduction, and 'sieur repeated: "Mistress Joyce Valentine, Madame—" He paused interrogatively, and Madame supplied, with savage celerity, "Madame Jessop."

She looked Joyce over with the measuring glance one adversary gives another when preparing for a bout at wrestling. This, she felt, was no milksop miss, but a woman to be reckoned with. New plans were even then brewing in her mind; but she said, with much complaisance, "Where shall I send the girl, and when?"

"To the keel-boat which leaves for Natchez this afternoon. My niece goes home by it," returned the 'sieur.

And when both, declining the hospitality of fruit and cake and wine which Madame urged upon them, were gone forth to the waiting carriage, she laughed triumphantly to herself. "So soon driven from the field—so soon and easily! Aha, my Jessop! I see you, and that which you represent, drifting even into my hand."

Joy's departure from her uncle's home was the more easily accomplished and created less stir in the household because Orléans and his suite were upon the same day embarking for Spain. "You are more fortunate than I," the young duke said, in making his adieus to Joyce. "You are going home, while I, fair

mistress, am setting out upon travels whose end I cannot foresee."

"God grant there be a throne at the goal of your highness's wanderings," interposed Madame Valentine, fervently.

Joyce said her farewells and went her way to the waiting carriage. It was necessary that her Uncle Henri's family should remain for the formal leave-taking with the royal party. So only Tante Sophie and Celeste accompanied Joy to the landing.

Arrived at the wharf, they found Neville on his horse waiting for them. His rich, dark curls were pushed down to cover the strip of plaster on his temple. Those wonderful eyes were all alight; the confident, affectionate boy was timid and tremulous with happiness that he was permitted to be her cavalier.

Joy's luggage, of which there was a bewildering amount, was properly placed. The conveyance upstream was a keel-boat with sweeps, and the merchandise was therefore stowed in the hold.

When Neville had lingered to see the last chest and package in place, Joy admonished for the twentieth time: "Maman will be angry, cousin, if you are not at the house when the duke departs. Please you to hurry back."

"Joyous," he whispered, when he came to make his farewells, "Luis hath made a child of me—but thou knowest. Wait for me, wilt not, dear heart? Let not Luis nor another persuade thee to wed ere I come."

The first touch of actual comfort and healing Joy had felt came to her with the boy's words. Somebody really loved her, after all. There was truth and devotion in the world. She clung to him, laughing a little, it is true, yet with tears in her eyes. "O Neville," she said, "you will find some one much better and more suitable than I when the time comes, and I have other

thoughts than those of marriage in my heart. But just now I cannot help being glad that you feel thus toward me. There will be some one after a while to make you very happy."

"'T is you I love, Joyous," he answered, a little reproachfully, "not myself. If a holy life calls you, sweet, as we have all fancied—if that be your meaning—why, then I shall be blest if I may come and be a hermit in that grove near your home."

"You are very dear to me, Neville," the girl answered, "and my heart bleeds for my other cousin. You must love your brother Luis, if I am to love you."

As she spoke, the boy's eyes were humid. Across his mind came the vision of that heart-shaking thing which had chanced to him at sunrise. It was after the fight. He had slept, his valet Césare watching over him. Suddenly he was awake; the room was full of gray light. Césare was gone. Beside his bed stood Luis. No other man can be to a boy so great as can his elder brother. The memory of that brother kneeling, groveling, humiliated, begging for pardon, still rent Neville's heart with pity and shame.

"Nay, Joyous, there is no quarrel between Luis and me," he declared loyally. "You must not think, because his hand slipped in a fencing-bout, that there was any quarrel."

When Joyce, tall woman that she was, reached up to proffer a good-by kiss to her six-foot boy lover, a little ripple of the irrepressible fun which was always in the girl flashed up. "Farewell, little cousin," she smiled. "I shall come no more to New Orleans until I come to dance at thy wedding. And doubt not I shall dance on that blest day—yea, though I have ere that become a preacher of the Word, and should be cast out for so doing."

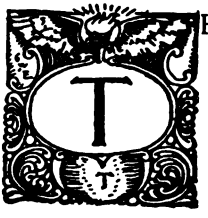
Neville put aside in true man fashion the allusion to

his possible marriage. "I have been urged to go into the priesthood, too," he returned, and added seriously, "But I shall always love you, Joyous, just as now."

The delicacy, the poetry, the distance of this boy's passion was balm to Joy's scorched heart. The unselfishness which asked nothing, gained much from her. And though she jested again about dancing at his wedding, Neville's heart was full of pride at her loving farewells.

THE WORLD IN THE WILDERNESS

CHAPTER XXVIII



HE boat was almost ready for departure when David Batchelor, who had been detained and had in his turn detained the craft, came hurrying down and boarded it. His presence brought a sense of protection and comfort to Joy. Yet, after he had greeted her and asked if he could be of service, she saw little of him till the boat was well on its way.

Zoombi had brought Lal to the landing. It was evident that the parting from her former attendant was full of terror to the child, yet so invincible was the dignity, so stern the self-control of this little stoic, that she made no outward demonstration. As the day wore on, she followed her mistress about like a little black shadow.

Joy sat on the prow when evening came, her sad, eager eyes searching the distance before her, as though their longing could bring her more swiftly to her journey's end.

The west was a glory of purple and rose. Even the widowed east, deserted by the sun, flung back a timid reflection of his passing smile, and mimicked the maiden blush of dawn upon the piled masses of her clouds.

Lalla crouched, a faithful silhouette, at Joy's feet. The great gray cape which Zette had brought and folded about her mistress as a protection from possible chill in the evening air, was fallen back. Its enveloping hood had dropped from her bright hair. David,

coming up from the boat's hold, stood looking long at the picture she made against the sunset light.

He advanced, and, seating himself on the rail beside her, asked: "Mistress Joyce, are you glad to be going home?"

She turned upon him somberly. "Glad?" she echoed, in a low, passionate tone; "can I ever be glad of anything again? I feel myself a leper. I am going home, sir, to see if at the touch of my dear old father's hand this pollution may pass from me; but I am not going home in a hopeful humor."

She dropped her head, and her eyes fixed themselves on the water as the prow cut slowly through it. "I feel sometimes," she continued, "as though, if I had no home to go to, I could find one there," and she pointed down to the sullen tide beneath her.

"Is 't so with you, my little friend?" asked David, tenderly. "Have things gone so ill? I am grieved to my heart's core."

"You are grieved!" exclaimed Joy. "Yea, and you should be. 'T was you who tossed me down into that current, sink or swim, to go clean under its black waves. But for you, Father Toby had never thought nor dared to do such a thing."

David neither denied nor affirmed his responsibility in the matter. "Believe me," he urged, "whatever wounds you, wounds me. Only I, who am a man and used to suffering, would that I could bear yours for you."

"'T is lightly said," returned Joy. "Men can neither bear, nor know, the sufferings women must go through. I think, Master Batchelor, that you were rash in your advice to my father. I give you this grace, that I believe you knew not what you did."

"Nay," demurred David, "give me no such grace as that. I knew all that I did, and yet I risked it."

Joy looked at him with wonderment. "Did you guess," she began, in a half whisper, "that I should walk with erring, sinful feet into a place where there was neither God nor duty? Did you know that all my old, sure faith would crumble from me, and did you believe that in the end I should find this fruit of worldly pleasure, so blooming to the sight, but dust and ashes, so that my mouth was filled with bitterness?"

A quiet light came into David's face as she spoke. "I hoped so," he answered, smilingly; and then Joy turned upon him.

"You hoped so?" she cried. "Have you not ruth nor pity, sir? Think you 't is well to put your fellow-creatures to the torture? Aye, torture sharper than the rack or thumb-screw; for while those hurt only the perishing body, this is the pangs of hell laid hold upon the soul. And know you, sir—learn all your work—I feel now sometimes that there is neither hope, nor love, nor trust, nor purity left in me. I am not only soiled and fouled by these things, but all the fabric of that which was my spiritual life is wrecked away from me. I seem to see myself a shivering, naked, desolate soul, adrift upon a spar in the ocean of doubt, and not one kindly beam of hope. This was your doing; and you say, now it is done, you like the work. You think 't was bravely done. Well, mayhap. Nothing that used to be is as it was. Perchance my father will come down to the water's edge and revile me, or, when I reach the cabin, will drive me with hard words from his door. All things seem possible, since what hath been."

David was silent so long, searching for an answer which might be helpful, that Joy, turned once more to her moody contemplation of the water, had quite forgotten his presence. The black child crouching beside

her comprehended little of what passed, yet she pushed nearer to her mistress's skirts, and, taking the hand which hung nerveless at Joy's side, caressed it softly, not kissing, but stroking it with a light, tender motion, as though it were a bird.

Presently David, having set his thoughts a bit in order, began with some little hesitation: "I doubt, my sister, if you are quite ready to hear this thing which I must say to you, and yet it cannot now be left unsaid. See, dear to my soul, I found you nearly ten years agone, a pearl dropped here in the wilderness—we will not say cast before swine, for our good folk should not be so called, but we will say uncomprehended, for that you were. Those things which are your chiefest virtues were like, in the narrow beliefs of our Society, to be named failings, to be even called deadly sin. Ah, little Joy, I had, myself, won through even such a pass. I brought a sore heart with me into this retreat. Through my suffering I found great peace. Yet I had lost the love of some whose love was much to me, and I had made some grave mistakes, from which 't was my thought, if the time should ever come, I would try, as best might be, to shield you."

The thought that David Batchelor, always simply one of the pleasant but prosaic facts of her life, had been thus concerned for her was new to Joy, and somewhat softened her mood. "Forgive me if I spoke hastily to you," she murmured.

"Nay, Joy, between you and me there will, I trust, never be question of wounding or forgiveness. I saw, dear, long ago that the strait creed which was your father's could never bind your spiritual life—as it will not, in the end, bind the life of the Society itself. I watched with anxiety—nay, with terror—as I saw you full of zeal to become a preacher of the Word, who had not yet tried your own soul."

Joy hung her head, and blushed for shame. "I was a presumptuous fool," she said bitterly, "who thought to teach others, when she herself did sorely need teaching."

"Only young, dear heart, with the beautiful confidence of youth, which needs must lead aright, though oft by difficult paths. You have in you, Joy, the soul of a poet—and a warrior, too," he added, smiling a little. "'T is a richly dowered nature. Every fairy who came to your christening gave you much, and the last mischievous one brought nothing which to my eyes was a fault. She simply set you, dear, in such surroundings that your best gifts from the other fairies had well been misunderstood—misprized.

"When Jessop came—"

Joy sprang to her feet. "Speak not of him!" she cried. "I cannot bear it. You do not know. Oh, never mention him to me again!" She wrung her hands together, and, turning from him, walked the length of the deck, past the piles of merchandise, among the groups of passengers, Lalla slipping in her wake, a fold of the white dress between her little black fingers.

When Joy came back her face, though pale, was quite calm. "Well, what of Master Jessop?" she asked quietly.

"When he came," resumed David, "and I knew, as I did almost immediately, of his lineage, when I found the man one to charm a maid, I thought perchance that other half of your bright nature would come uppermost, and you, who might be almost anything you chose, become a great lady, reconciling this young prodigal to his own people."

Joy's face was hard and cold. It had softened much during her conversation with David, but these words brought back all her former bitterness. "The man is

already wed. Let us not speak of him. 'T is naught to me whether he be wedded or no. 'T was only one thing among the many. Methinks that you can tell me, without bringing Master Jessop in, why you were fain to have me put to the torture. Can you not do so? He is no longer part of anything for me."

"We cannot say that of the past, and make it true, however fain," demurred David. "As I say, when I thought such was to be your future—when Jessop came to me and voiced his love for you, and begged my intercession—"

"Did he do so?" interrupted Joy, with cool contempt. "I wonder why he did?"

"Then," David continued, "I began to fear that, taking up a life so different from the one to which your youth was trained, you might find, when the thing was irrevocable, that it had been the wrong thing. And believing, as I do, that all souls must be proved—yea," in answer to her look of inquiry, "proved in the torture. If they be such souls as yours or mine they must have torture, they wring it from the common affairs of life—believing this, I advised your father as I did.

"And, Joy," he added softly, "I am not sorry. Behold, dear, though you know it not, an ill thing hath done you only good, and you will build upon foundation stones hewn by the strong hands of this pain and doubt a new Joyce Valentine, who shall be better than the old, wiser, broader, a tower of strength, 'a very present help in time of trouble' to all about her."

"Think you so?" asked Joy, wearily. "I only know that now I am in an oozy sea of unfaith and horror, and that I think I never shall get back to mine old foothold."

"Nay, that you never may. God grant you never shall. We must go forward in this world, dear heart,

not back to childish things; and when you find a better place to stand, a higher outlook on this world of ours, you will not regret the past."

In the long days and nights which followed, these matters were not mentioned between the two. By mutual understanding they were dropped, and David, for the diversion of the heart-weary girl, drew upon stores of entertainment unguessed by her.

He had indeed been a soldier, had traveled widely, and was well read. But most grateful of all to poor Joy at this time, he had a strong and restful personality, not ruffled by every little gust of adverse opinion, but bearing steadily and calmly toward his purposes.

Batchelor's hold on those with whom he came in close contact was very marked. He laid no conscious finger upon any creature. It was the size and poise of the man. Lesser, weaker, more easily moved natures were held by this and by the impression that he gave of reserve force, feeling, stored knowledge, which might at need be disclosed and made available. Finally, the attraction, the drawing power was that conjectured inner sanctuary from which a suave immobility barred the merely curious.

Jessop's attraction, equally strong, was manifested along the lighter, more ephemeral lines of fascination. The charm of the two men represented the subjective and the objective, the lasting and the impermanent.

Joy and David sang together, as they had been wont to sing in the little meeting-house at home. Madame Valentine would have held, and Joyce while under her influence, that finding upon the boat an unmarried man with whom she was well acquainted, she should scarce speak to him all the long journey through. But the girl was already back in a clearer, freer atmosphere. Upon a craft like this, with the necessary publicity of all one's daily living, there was chaperonage enough, as she well

knew, to satisfy Father Tobias; and, even so, she was growing to the stature when satisfying Joyce Valentine in such matters was sufficient.

"I wonder much," she said one day to David, "that you, with all your love of freedom, joined yourself to our Society."

"Why, look you," he responded, laughing a little, "I have not bound myself even there. 'T was the best to be had. I was done with the old creeds. There is a purity and uprightness among the followers of this new faith which draws me to them; but, as I say, I have not bound myself, nor shall till the life be broader, holding more of God's love than now it doth."

Something of the old Joy was coming back, or was it the beginnings of that new Joy which David so confidently predicted? She turned and laughed. "Master Batchelor," she quoth, "with all your caution, all your determination to be free, how will you ever wed?"

"When the time comes," returned David, with unexpected gravity, "if come it ever does, 't will be the one bondage sweet to me."

And somehow, though the words were said in most impersonal fashion, and not one glance made any nearer application of them, Joy found herself blushing, and turned her head to hide this strange embarrassment.

If the Joyce Valentine who traveled back over that route which she had come months before was a new creature, it surely seemed to her that she had met with a new David Batchelor. Always a man to command admiration, she now saw him one to win love.

Once, in a rare moment of confidence, David spoke to the girl of his people and his home in Scotland. "I come of a line of ecclesiastics, Joy," he said—"Scotch Covenanters, proud of their blood as any princes—proud with that pride which apes humility. Daring

to think for myself, I would fain, when I came to man's estate, have lived in harmony with them without subscribing fully to their creed—even as I do with our Society at Natchez."

"And you could not?"

"'T was not to be. I loved them, but not their creed. They could not permit me to distinguish in the matter. I gave my world, as it then stood, for freedom. I have always thought it well lost."

There were whole days when the black waters went over Joy's soul; then nothing, not even his voice, reached her. At such times she sat on the boat edge, staring at the river, and begged to be let alone. However Zette's ministrations might be rejected, Lalla always crouched beside Joy, and if she could gain a moment's recognition, would sing or talk to her young mistress.

It was then Joy learned from the child all the details of her life in that bright, never-forgotten past. A desolation so much greater than her own, sent upon one so young, and borne with such fortitude, shamed her to once more trying heartily.

She learned, too, from Lalla numerous Latin prayers and chants. David found her one evening humming these over, and corrected here and there her Latin phrases. Then, joining his voice to hers, they sat and sang for near an hour.

"Veni, Creator, spiritus
Mentes tuorum visita,"

rang the sonorous words across the water.

Joy looked at David, and smiled a little ruefully. "Master Batchelor, she asked, "are you leading me farther astray? We both know right well what the Society would think of these Popish chantings."

"Nay," returned David, "we are neither of us, surely, doing any ill. Examine your own heart, Mistress Joyce. Doth it not tell you that these songs speak also of God, even as do our Methody hymns? Yea, and the day shall come when our own Society, reared to a mighty church, grown to that stature which its truth deserves, will not despise any form of earnest worship."

"Think you so?" inquired Joy, doubtfully. She was yet a child in some things, and the immutability of the laws her elders made was still one of her prime beliefs. "Why, that would be heaven, indeed. Could I but take the hand of those once in spiritual accord with me, and say to them, 'Such and such things have I done which were wrong, and of them I do repent me; I freely renounce them; I will do them no more. But such other things also have I done, of which I do not repent, because they are not wrong, though ye have condemned them,'—if I could do that, Master Batchelor, and they would not cast me out, I think I could take up my life once more and live it."

"'T is too much to expect," murmured David, wistfully. "I would that I could spare her, but the time is not yet ripe. They will not fellowship her now, and yet—" He turned to Joy. "This thing of meeting the Society, of facing all that you have done, 't will come to you how it shall be. You are much beloved, Joy; if you go back, saying no word of all these things, methinks no word will be said to you in return. Your father's daughter may not be reproved, nor disciplined, nor cast out. What think you? Can you do it?"

Joy looked at him in wonderment. "Do that?" she cried. "Sneak back into the fold? Wouldst have me? Why, if 't were good for me to know and do [illegible] things which I have done, 't is surely well I

go back and tell of them, and take such sentence as is imposed. Is it not well to do so? Is it not?"

"It is," he answered. "God grant you patience in the doing. Patience, my fiery friend, 't is all you lack. God grant it you, God keep you, and God bless you! I—"

He turned away with something left unspoken, came back, and said: "To-morrow we shall be home, Mistress Joy, or so the captain hopes. To-morrow sees the beginning of this fight. I will not come to you unless you send for me; but I will hope that, having any need—the lightest—you will send. Will you do so?" Joy promised, and the next day's noon saw them near Natchez.

Father Tobias was waiting at the landing. His tender acceptance of Joy as the same child he had left at his brother's house in New Orleans was to her inexpressibly touching. She laughed fondly at his troubled wonder over her two black waiting-women, her fine attire, and apparently endless luggage.

"Ah, Father Toby, Father Toby!" she said. "Thou wilt find thy Joy changed in more matters than those of worldly prosperity and worldly attire."

"Why, now I look at you," returned Father Tobias, a little anxiously, "this frock you wear—'t is monstrous pretty, dear heart, do not think I criticize it—would surely bring you under discipline."

The boat had landed to discharge Mistress Joy and her parcels at the little wharf near the cabin, and six miles from Natchez as the river ran. There was none to see them, none to remark upon the offending gown, and Father Tobias, who found he must supplement his one bullock-cart with some more commodious means of transportation if he would get Joy's boxes to the house before nightfall, bade her go on with David, and himself would follow when he could.

To this Master Batchelor would not consent, but, sending them ahead, and giving Lal and Zette what they could comfortably carry, himself set about the transportation of Joy's baggage.

Who that has been young, gone from home to finer things, and then returned, does not remember the dizzy sense of unreality which comes when these familiar belongings are seen once more with that new vision gotten out in the world? Was the house always so small? Has it not shrunk? Is it possible that we lived all these years lacking so many necessary things, and never knew it? Why, calling up with difficulty the self we were before we went away, we can remember that we thought these strange, small, dark, unfriendly things part of the eternal verities. And now we are come back, there are no verities; and the strangeness which lay upon the world outside, when we first met it, has stolen back to face us here.

As she stepped through the cabin doorway, Joy felt an impulse to bend her head. The portals of her uncle's mansion were tall enough to admit a man on horseback, and most of them were so wide that a coach could have been driven through; and the great, white, lofty ceilings gave a sense of space and freedom. These low rafters of her father's roof closed down above her head so that for a moment she felt a resentful sense of being shut away beneath it from what was beautiful and bright and high.

But this bewildered feeling was scarcely more than momentary. The bullock-cart followed them close. Lal, under Zette's direction, was busy helping place its freight.

Joy, finding that Faithful had usurped the hearthstone entirely and driven Satan out, flew to the door to call her pet. Then on to the fowl-yard to greet its feathered citizens, and so to the cow-lot, where Father

Tobias found her, her arms around the neck of the Devon heifer, receiving bovine sympathy and caresses.

Finally, recalled to the cabin, she found that Zette had opened the dower-chest of silver, and also one of fine linen—her aunt's gift. "Only zat mamzelle shall see 'im before Zette put 'im away," urged the negress. David, coming in with a second load, found Father Tobias rather more distressed than pleased as he watched Joy examine these gifts. She had not seen them before, and her housewifely soul could but delight in them, while a few belated, frost-bitten doubts as to the righteousness of such delight—poor little offspring of lifelong habit—limped sadly in the rear.

When David was gone, and the two negresses in the kitchen preparing the evening meal, Father Toby put a bewildered hand to his head. "Methinks, daughter Joy," he said, "that you have brought with you a very considerable portion of that world which you went forth to see."

"Yes, father," returned Joy, lovingly and gravely, "I have brought the visible sign and token of it, and I fear you may think that I have brought more of it in my heart."

"A preacher of the Word," suggested the old man gently, "should not wear that which will bring her under the discipline." The offending gown had not been removed.

"Father dear," answered Joy, "I hope it may not wound you—that is the one thing for which I now care; but I have not one garment in my boxes the wearing of which would not bring me under discipline."

"I fear—I much fear," said Father Tobias, sadly, " 't was a great mistake for you to go. You were too young. You should not have been subjected to this test."

"Nay," returned Joy, firmly, and then for the first time the meaning of it all unrolled itself before her. She realized what was coming to her out of its turmoil and distress. She saw with David Batchelor's eyes. She knew now why he advised the thing, and she added simply:

"Father Toby, if I am not disciplined—but I shall be, of course—I shall myself ask the Society to consider my case. I want to speak to them in the meeting-house, dear—there where I presumptuously believed I was called upon to preach the Word—and tell them of my experience."

"That may not be," returned Father Tobias. "'T is not allowed. But Joy—little Joy—my little daughter," he added, his voice breaking suddenly, "you have surely done naught which would bring you before your class."

Joy was kneeling at his knees as they talked. He took her face between his hands, and gazed into it with wistful tenderness. "'T is the same face," he murmured, "as dear and pure—but high-couraged. Are you sure, my dear, that you do not in this matter mistake for a prompting of the spirit some feeling of resentment at that yoke which we all must wear? I had my times, daughter—when I was young and perchance too full of fiery zeal—when I would have disputed with the very founders of the church. That 's youth, dear; 't is naught else. Consider well, daughter, before you speak of these matters to—to—others than your old father, who loves you and who understands."

"I will, father," agreed Joy, briefly. "I will consider. I have thought of naught else since first this thing came upon me; but I promise you to do nothing rash; and, most of all, I long to spare my dear, dear old father any pang."

CHAPTER XXIX

T fell upon the morning following Joy's return that Father Tobias set out for one of the near-by stations of his circuit. The cheerful serenity of his daughter's bearing entirely reassured him, and he bade her good-by with no further apprehensions.

Immediately her father was gone, Joy turned as one to a definite aim. She began, with Zette, to set the house in very spotless order. Soon, leaving the negress to complete the work, she took her way down a wild little thread of path to the hut of an Indian woman, a mile beyond Father Tobias's cabin. She was seeking Tohopeka, that she might send a message to David Batchelor, bidding him to her at once.

June had breathed full and warm upon the Southern land, and all sweet, wild things ripened into richer life under her magic. Joy looked about her wistfully. Her home country had never seemed so beautiful to her; the birds had never sung with so much rapture; the sky had never been so blue. Spring was over. It was the royal outburst of lusty summer, and her heart rose to it. Despite the deep waters through which she had passed—nay, the more for them—Joy Valentine still stood for all the goodliness of youth and faith and the unshaken hopefulness of living.

The little, thready path now left the open pasture, with its straggling growth and burning heat, and conducted her to some bars, through which she stepped al-

most at once into the cloistered coolness of a tall wood. This was the magnolia grove. The mighty boles, clean of undergrowth, dignified, reserved, widely separated, rose ten, fifteen, twenty feet into the air before beginning to reach out brotherly branches. All gravity and silence and earnestness in the sequestered deeps of their life—the life of root and stem—they lifted to the world of sun and air shining faces of green leaves, and held aloft their great, laughing cups of fragrance to feed every light prodigal of a June breeze.

Long, vague banners of the Spanish moss draped, wreathed, garlanded bole, branch, and blossom. Sometimes it was right up out of its cloudy, muffling ghastliness that the rich, warm, vigorous blooms thrust their argent splendors. And Joy smiled to see them. For so was her clean, healthy, powerful life lifting itself out of the dim, clinging pains, doubts, and despairs which had clutched and dulled her.

Still smiling, she went on with swift, silent footsteps, following the tiny path which showed the way with so much boldness amid these majestic sanctities.

She came out from the green stillness of the grove, across a tiny brook, a bit of half-wild pasture, and reached the Indian hut. Finding nobody at home, she turned hesitatingly back, but almost immediately met Lalla. The child's unskilled fingers had so bungled the few tasks allotted her that Zette had first called her a little botch, and then good-humoredly driven her forth, to be rid of her.

As Joy's eye lit upon the small royalty, "Come, Lalla," she cried, smiling, "we will e'en carry our own message." And together they turned back toward "The Meadows." Joy sought the quietest paths, and reached David's home, having met upon the way but two or three of her old friends.

David's hounds—he was an ardent huntsman—

greeted her joyously. David himself was nowhere in sight. She stepped across the gallery to the open door, and, glancing in, beheld a picture which remained with her always.

It was evidently a training-day, and David, who was captain of the train-band at Natchez, was dressed in his uniform, ready to depart. It came to the smiling girl with a little shock of surprise that he was a big, strong, beautiful young man, and impressive in his quiet way.

But that which was better than beauty, or even dignity, his own seasoned and benignant kindliness, illumined his face as she looked. Reason had asked to see the sword, and David—so different is a man's method with a child from a woman's—drew the blade from its scabbard and laid it across the baby's knees, saying only: "Have a care, young soldier; 't is sharp."

The child's eyes filled with quick tears. "Dadie's sword could n't cut Reasie," he protested, with a mixture of distress and confidence.

"Why, yes, my little man," returned David, gravely, "a sword will e'en cut. 'T was meant to cut wicked people, but if a good person be careless with it, 't will hurt him, too."

"Dadie show Reasie how," came the swift demand. "Reasie is a dood boy; now Dadie show him how to be careful."

The apple-cheeked little face was pressed close beside the strong, bronzed countenance of the man. Two pairs of very earnest blue eyes watched the play of the glittering blade as the small fist was adjusted to its hilt; then David looked up and caught sight of Joy.

Her coming drove all thought of his new plaything from the child's mind. She was already prime favorite with him, but now something more caressing, freer, in her manner caught his quick attention.

"Doyce dot a pitty coat," he announced promptly. "Reasie love Doyce much."

"'T is ever thus the younger and more frivolous of mankind are snared," commented David, with mirthful eyes.

When she was seated, and Reasie, with Lalla in tow, gone to display some childish treasure, Joy had time to look about her at certain changes which had been made in the room since last she saw it.

"Why, David," she commented, having come, during the intimacy of their long journey up, to use his name familiarly, "meseems I am not the only one who hath a leaning toward the flesh-pots of beauty and luxury."

"That are you not," rejoined David, heartily. "And yet, Joy—'t is the strangest thing to me—I knew not fully how I lacked for these things till I saw you amid a worldly setting."

"Am I leading you astray?" she murmured, a little troubled, and then she laughed, in the safe, comfortable assurance that here was a soul she could not lead —or, leading in the least, could only lead aright.

Now she put forward that request which she had come to make, that he would help her to have the class take action upon her case before her father's return.

"These friends of mine must know me as I am," she said. "Then, if they cast me out—" Her voice failed a little at the thought.

"Why, if they cast you out," supplied David, smiling, though with some serious meaning in his tones, "'t will be into the limbo where I am. Hast ever thought of that, Joy?"

Joy flashed one of her old, quick smiles at him. "Yea, so 't is," she said. "I never think of it. You seem so one of us—and not the least. But, after all,

were I cast out I should but be where you remain by choice."

The thought appeared to comfort her. She made request of David that he go to the leader of her class, explain to him her desire for discipline, and ask that the class meet in her father's house the following morning.

"I so much want to have them all hear, David," she added; "but father declares I may not be judged in the meeting-house. Will you not beg brother Ambrose Gibson that I may have as many of the Society bidden to come as be willing to attend? Believe me, 't is not in the spirit of one who flaunts what she hath done, or who desires to offend."

"Surely," returned David, "I know that, and am in heartiest accord with your wish in this. I will do all I can to have this matter arranged as you ask. And I will come betimes to tell you how I speed."

As they took their way homeward, the child gathered armfuls of tall ferns, woodland blossoms, and fragrant leaves. Joyce remembered, with a sort of patient wonder at the blackness of her ignorance in times past, that she would once have thought the decking of a house with such things folly, if not sin. Now, when Lalla said to her, "Can you reach the big, white flowers, Madonna? Lalla would take some back home to make the house beautiful," Joy went back with the child along the path, and when they came, in the grove, to a young magnolia-tree well laden with fine blossoms, she broke an arm-load of the great, creamy things, each white chalice in a setting of shining green, and gave them to Lal to carry on before, while she should follow at her leisure.

Her purpose, at first scarce formulated, was now taking complete shape in her mind. Most of all things on earth, the natural Joyce Valentine craved love. Yet,

to have a love which was given her mistakenly, which would have been denied her had she been fully understood, this was what her honesty could not brook.

"They shall know all," she said to herself; "yes, know and realize it as fully as I can make them. Then, if after that they have the heart to love me, I shall know that God can love me, too."

Through the fabric of Joy's courage, both moral and physical, there had run always an odd little feminine thread of shrinking. She was afraid of small, creeping things. An inch-worm on her gown would set her shuddering, when a panther's cry from the cane-brake could not stir the color in her cheek, nor bring her heart's beat a second faster. Now, with a sudden intake of breath, she noted, glancing down at the path, a brown caterpillar making his slow and devious way across just where she would have set her foot.

She stopped short, and stood looking down thoughtfully at the furry atom. "Art thou, too, adrift in a world too big for thee, little brother?" she asked softly, and knelt to examine the worm more closely. The hairs upon it were golden at their roots, changing at the tips to jet. "How beautiful it is!" she whispered. "Why, I never dreamed one of the things could be beautiful!"

Across her mind came the text, "Perfect love casteth out fear." "I shall never be afraid of them again." And then, noticing the little creature questing and changing his path, she said, "Who knows what longings for love animate this tiny frame?" and reached down a tentative forefinger to stroke the worm gently.

"God bless you," she said. "God send you may find that for which you seek;" then Joy arose, and her heart was lightened, for she had received as well as bestowed a blessing.

Arrived at the cabin, she found that her new waiting-

woman had made some very considerable alteration in its appearance. Following the plans to which she had been trained, the negress had attempted to beautify its plain interior as much as possible, and Lalla, whose flowers, much to her joy, had not been rejected, was now bunching them into bouquets, preparatory to filling the few cups and bowls which she had been able to gather together for the purpose.

"Now, Zette," called Joy, in high, cheerful tones, "let us bring out the best we have, and put the house *en fête.*"

The woman was nothing loath. She assisted in opening the great chests and packing-cases, which had come with them the day before, and which had mostly been stowed in a little shed adjoining the cabin. Out of these they drew stores of bright-colored draperies, rugs, and fine linen spreads rich with needlework and lace. All the silver in Joy's dower-chest was brought out.

The plain old deal table upon which she had made her bread for years was carried in from the kitchen, and, trimmed with scarfs, set forth with silver, was converted into a buffet.

When they had done, the room was indeed transformed. There were some glaring incongruities, but yet the changes they had made would serve to typify to her friends, as Joy intended they should, the change in herself.

While they were yet working, steps sounded without, and David Batchelor's tall form stood in the doorway. He looked about him with approval, then came straight to where Joy stood; taking both her hands, he said, "That 's my brave girl. I knew that you would meet it even as it should be met."

"I longed for you, at first," Joy answered, "to prop my failing courage, supposing it should fail; but,

David, I find my spirit mounts as I go on in this. I know I must be right. 'T would not be so if I were wrong."

"Yes," returned David, with much content; "do you so? Then all is well with you. Not my approval, nor that of another, is needed."

"Can you be here?" she asked, a little wistfully, as David prepared to go, after telling her that her class and as many more of the Society as she should bid him notify would meet with her on the following afternoon.

"That may not be, dear heart," he answered her. "I belong to no class. My spirit will be with thee, not anxiously, for I know that all you do will be well done, but full of pride in you."

Next morning, and till long after noon, the opening of the heavy boxes, the sorting and placing of the beautiful articles which they contained, many of which Joy now saw for the first time, kept both women occupied.

Since Joy could remember, time had been told in Father Tobias's cabin by a noon-mark upon the kitchen floor. Now she wound, afterward setting it by this same noon-mark, a great ormolu clock of rococo design, and placed it upon the mantel-board. When its gilded hands pointed the quarter before two, she went to make certain alterations in her dress.

She decided not to put on, as she had at first thought of doing, a ball gown. That would be foolish, would look defiant, and belie her. She would wear just such a frock as she had been wont to wear for afternoons there in her uncle's house—just such a frock as she considered a gentlewoman ought to wear who was young and fair, and who cared enough for beauty to desire to set off properly so much as God had given her.

One of the gifts which came in her well-filled coffers

was a Venetian mirror. This was hung above the small, rude toilet-table in her little attic room. And when Mistress Joy had finished dressing before it, she turned and went down the steep stair to the room below.

Her foot had not reached the last step when the clock chimed out the hour of two in clear, thin tones, and after it the little music-box which was connected with the mechanism set off upon a merry dance-tune.

At the same instant Sister Longanecker, with the inevitable Patience close following, reached the door. Up went both hands; her mouth was open, but words failed her. 'T was perhaps because she was deprived, on this occasion, of the opportunity to tell what Patience said to her; for Patience, hanging back, merely glared with those light-blue, protruding eyes of hers, and, like her mother, was quite dumb.

"Come in," called Joy. "I am right glad to see you." She went forward, took a hand of each, and drew them, in an almost cataleptic state, into the room.

They stared about it, and then at Joy's unusual attire. Finally Sister Loving, whose usual small, piping tones were quite inadequate to the occasion brought out in thundering bass, "What does—Pastor Tobias—say to all this? What does it mean? Have ye turned Papist, Joyce Valentine, and set up an altar here in your father's house?"

It was the buffet which had called forth this last. Joyce answered all these queries in one, as she replied: "I have called you here, dear Sister Loving, along with the others, that I may tell you exactly what it all doth mean."

As they spoke, other members of the Society presented themselves, were welcomed by Joyce, and took their places silently upon the seats prepared for them.

The men, after their first look at the untoward deco-

ration of the room, kept their eyes down-dropped, as though they feared contamination from the sight. But the women, more curious or more attracted by their unusual surroundings, kept stealing glances now and then, though evidently half ashamed to do so.

The next batch of arrivals brought Brother Ambrose Gibson, leader of Joy's class. He paid slight heed to the reception which had been prepared for them, but took her aside for speech.

"This is a most unusual proceeding, Sister Joyce," he said. "I know not but that I do ill to accede to your request. Why do we not wait till your father, our beloved pastor, is at home? I earnestly conjure you to do so."

Joy shook her head. "'T was to spare him all I might," she answered, "that I chose this day of his absence. Are we not all brothers and sisters here? Is there aught but loving-kindness in any of your hearts toward me? Why should I need my father's protection against you?"

Silenced, but not convinced, the good old man went back into the room and took his station with the others. The class was now almost fully assembled, and Joy arose before them, prepared to speak. As she did so, the clock reached the half hour.

Again, following the stroke, came a little, chiming, lilting bit of dance music. She paused uncertainly. Most of the women listened with ill-concealed delight, but Brother Hamtramck's rasping voice inquired, "Can you not silence that ungodly instrument, Sister Joyce?"

Outside the window a mocking-bird on a blossoming spray, atilt in the wind, was pouring out his soul in a mad ecstasy of music.

As the last note of the clock chime ceased, and left the bird-song more insistently audible, Joy lifted a warning finger. "Shall we not silence both, brother?" she

asked gently. "God hath, it seems, choristers who do not sing hymns only."

There being no reply, she went on: "I have called you here, my friends, because there are matters which must be settled betwixt us. I feel myself an offending member of our Society, and I desire to be questioned and disciplined."

"As I have been telling our sister, this is not seemly," interrupted Ambrose Gibson. "The government of our Society provides that an offending member be first dealt with by the pastor, or by some elder or class leader, and that privately. We have no wish to be unduly harsh. If our sister here, being thus dealt with in private, promise amendment, saying she hath been in fault, that is all the letter of our law demands; then the fault is washed away; it is as though it had not been. Even if for a time she refuse such acknowledgment and atonement, but yet press not this open disagreement upon us, surely our loving-kindness is sufficient to pardon the error." He looked entreatingly about him. This most zealous young member of his class was very dear to the old man's soul.

"I pray you," returned Joy, more firmly than before, "do not use undue gentleness toward me. Remember I am that one who felt called upon—who believed she had a genuine call—to preach the Word. Surely, if I be in error, my fault is greater than the fault of another. I earnestly desire to be questioned."

And though the class leader still deprecated the too public occasion which made it appear that they were using excessive severity toward a sister whom they all loved, he finally, and with manifest reluctance, put the question, "Have you worn ribbons or other gauds unsuited to a member of the Society?"

For answer, Joy pointed to the gown she wore, a

flowered muslin, bound and looped with ribbons of tabbied silk.

"But you do repent of that?" urged the old man, eagerly. "You will put off such unseemly wear?"

"Yea," answered Joy, smiling, "when the trees in springtime put off their joyous beauty of green leaves and wear instead repentant gray; when the flowers are all dyed in somber hues, and the noonday sky is black instead of blue—then, brother, I shall see in it God's command that I go sadly all my days, then shall I know that beautiful apparel is a snare."

From this drowning rush of heretical eloquence the elder sought refuge in the mere form of the discipline; and, "Have you indulged in worldly pleasures to the injury of your soul?" his hesitant voice went on, through cadences of helpless wonder and mild persuasion.

"In worldly pleasures?—yes," answered Joy. "Such things as I have been wont most to condemn, those have I done. I have danced."

There was a perceptible stir among her hearers; Sister Loving moaned aloud.

"Aye," went on Joy, "I learned to dance, most painfully. To theaters have I been, and to races. Such music as you heard but now, and found so unpleasing, is only a little echo of those sounds to which I have been listening entranced. But, for the further part of your questioning, whether I did these things to the hurt of mine own soul, I doubt it. For all of them, I were, perchance, no whit the worse. The fault I would confess to you, though you do not question me of it, is that, for a time, I put these worldly pleasures and successes above the welfare of my spirit; I forgot to read the Word, I left off praying. I found not in his commandments my delight; and when trouble came upon me, and shame and humiliation of spirit, they

found me afar from the shelter of God's love. All these things I did and suffered; and, having proved them bitter in the end, I humbly repented of them. I could not fall into that snare again.

"But ye must know the new Joyce Valentine who hath come home to you. There is an inward and spiritual man, who more doth signify than this outward and visible. And this Joyce, whose outward show calls for your censure, she hath, beneath the ribbon of disobedience, a larger heart to love her kind withal. 'T is now—like our Savior's own—acquainted with grief. And since, even like his, it knows the sorrows and pains and weaknesses of this our human frame, it can never again shut its doors to any brother's need. Nor can it ever come back to be so narrow that it can hold but our Society. I have e'en been inside a Catholic church. Oh, yes," in answer to a sort of groan which went up from her hearers, "I went there with those whom I loved. They are Catholics. They went to the confessional. And in mine own dark hour, when I had done so ill that God's face was hid from me, I, too, went there."

"Went to confessional?" thundered one of the old men.

"Yea," replied Joyce, "even to confessional. I did confess me to their priest. And he, Brother Ambrose, gave me as good advice as you or any mortal man could give. All his words seemed to bring God nearer to me." She paused a moment. "And in the end he blessed me."

"A Popish practice," muttered Brother Dunn.

There fell a long silence. The men had plucked up spirit to look about them. Keziah Hamtramck nudged her liege lord, and whispered, "Heritage, I would have you to look at the silver there on that table. 'T is enough to buy a farm—two farms, methinks. And,"

she concluded triumphantly, "it comes not within the discipline!"

"My dear young sister," said the old class leader at last, "what would you have us do with you? This is a most strange and unnatural proceeding. Do you desire to be quit of us? Is that the thing which you would ask?"

The tears were in his eyes. Tears in Joy's eyes answered them. "Nay—oh, not so," she replied. "Ye are my people, and surely your God is my God. But I have gathered you together here that you may know there are things in our discipline to which hereafter I cannot conform. If these things cause you to cast me out, why then, in all good will, let me go forth from among you."

"You are young," returned the old man. "The young are still hot-headed. You will change your mind. What are these things which you love better than your father's faith?"

"Stay," spoke Joy, quickly, and, though her voice was kind, it rang with undiminished courage, "all is well between my father and me. All is well now between God and me. 'T is only between my class and myself, between the Society and myself, that there must be no shadow. I shall live here among you, I doubt not, till I am an old woman. I shall be one of you, if I may. But I shall never more hold that beauty and mirth and music—yea, and dancing, too, and all those things which go to make up the innocent pleasures of life—are sinful."

"Do—do you intend to dance?" inquired an awed feminine voice from a back seat—"you, a pastor's daughter!"

"I do not," replied Joy. Her sweet face looked pale, and for the first time her eyes were full of trouble. "There are some thoughts it would bring up which are too painful to me. I shall not dance again."

And now there fell upon the group a long, distressed silence. Finally a gaunt old matron, a true frontierswoman both on the material and the spiritual frontier, rose up and said; "Why not let this lie awhile? Why decide it till our pastor hath returned?"

"Oh, I pray you," began Joy, hurriedly, "I beg of you—I cannot bear it! Do not put this thing upon my father. Let it be finished here and now."

But the other answered shrewdly—she was old enough to know the mellowing power of time in human destinies—"Why should we not continue Sister Joyce a member of us for six months—upon probation, as it were? If at the end of six months she sees reason for to change her mind, and to come back to our way of thinking, I know that we shall all be right glad. And if she do not so, why, we shall be no worse off. Her ticket can be taken from her, though we would all beg that if she offend not in her practices more than she promiseth to-day, she still hold us in such kind good-fellowship as might lead her to attend our meetings, even as David Batchelor and several more who never yet have joined with us are doing."

"'T would put her outside her class," sighed the class leader.

"Yes, but six months," counseled the matron in a lower tone—"a maid may well change her mind in six months. I have known them that could change in six minutes." And thus, after further discussion and earnest prayer, it was agreed.

Brother Gibson went forth first and alone. Then Heritage Hamtramck voyaged as far as the doorway, where he stopped and looked back, calling for his spouse.

"Nay, go your way!" she cried pettishly. "I will o'ertake you. I have somewhat to say to Sister Joyce."

When she had watched him half way to the gate,

she turned back and whispered, "Sister Joyce, pray show me your frocks. I have seen naught like that gown you wear. It must be a new mode; and though I care not for new modes, yet it monstrously becomes you, and I fain would see if you have others finer."

Sister Loving and Patience, on an open tour of the room, were systematically inspecting everything.

"I wonder, now, if you could show me this stitch here," cried Sister Charity Krumpecker. She drew Joyce toward the buffet, and pointed to a particular line in its embroidered cover. "Good lack, man!" she snapped, as her husband suggested that they must be going, "can I not stay one moment to learn a new sort of work to set my hand to?"

In short, the women were all women as well as Methodies. When the men were at last gotten rid of, Joy was obliged to bring out, or to have Zette bring out and display, every gift she had received in her uncle's house.

The ruined ball gown only, a memento too significant for any eyes but her own, lay undisturbed in its box up in the little attic room.

CHAPTER XXX

THAT scene at Joy's home, in which she had boldly taken her stand, earnestly desiring not to be fellowshiped if aught in her conduct was displeasing to the Society, did not produce the result she expected. There was no disposition in the members to draw away from her—this would have seemed to Joy perfectly natural; their inclination was, rather, to hold her in closer fellowship with themselves.

It was touching to her to observe an effort among the sisters to offer her small, kindly attentions. No quilting was thought of unless she was bidden. The apple-cuttings were not complete without her. And late one afternoon Tohopeka brought a request from Sister Loving Longanecker that Joy come over the next day, as they intended to pluck geese.

In these days Joy had rather unwholesomely ample leisure. Zette was an accomplished cook as well as waiting-woman, and poor Lalla, who could never learn anything through harshness, was being taught by her love for her new mistress to become an acceptable little servitor.

About three o'clock, Joy, with the little faithful shadow in attendance, took her way over to Mistress Longanecker's. She was met at the door by Patience, who told her that "mommy" was busy catching the geese. After Joyce had laid off her hat and been

offered the refreshment of the period and section, she was taken through the house to a great, bare, unfinished room at the back, where the geese were to be plucked. There she found Sister Loving, and—she longed to have some one to say it to—"about twenty other geese."

Sister Longanecker, "a sight to shake the midriff of despair with laughter," came forward and greeted Joy warmly.

"If you don't put them on," she explained, "the fuzz and the feathers gits all into your clothes. And so I say, fix yourself up right in the beginnin'. Patience says to me, says she, says Patience, 'Mommy, you're enough to make a hoss shy.' But I says, 'Well, I won't scare the geese, I reckon—so where 's the difference?' "

The articles deprecated by the prudent Patience as calculated to alarm horses, formed a sort of regalia donned by Mistress Longanecker whenever called upon to act as high priestess of the solemn rite of goose-plucking.

Sister Loving's large feet were thrust through the sleeves of an ample white nightrail, the skirts of which were turned upward. A string run through the hem girded its ample fullness about her waist, and, as the garment was both long and wide, it drooped gracefully around her ankles, somewhat after the manner of Turkish trousers.

About these same stout ankles of hers were wrapped other strings to band in the sleeves of the nightrail and exclude intruding feathers. Her own sleeves were drawn down and bound snugly at the wrists; her head was enveloped in a great turban, somewhat like those worn by negresses, but more fearsome. Altogether, she was such a figure of fun as is not often seen outside a circus—nor, indeed, frequently matched in one.

After greeting Joy, she once more tallied over her geese, the objects of her immediate onslaught. It appeared that there was one, or possibly there were two, missing.

"Patience!" she shrieked, "the big gander ain't here, and I miss out the oldest gray goose. Bring 'em in before we start."

She capered up and down the room, following the hissing, shrieking geese, and attempted once more to count them. "No, he ain't here," she shouted, just as two or three squawking fowls ran between her feet and tripped her up.

More calls for Patience followed, and finally Sister Loving, who appeared to lack not only the young woman of that cognomen, but the quality for which she was named, decided that she would herself sally forth and capture the omitted geese.

"Oh, no," remonstrated Joy, quaking with inward laughter; "please do not you go; Patience will be here anon, or I will get them for you."

"Nay," retorted Sister Loving; "a body's business is never so well attended to as when he 'tends to it himself. I am a-goin' out and git them geese!"

She started with such celerity as the hampering sleeves of the nightrail, which permitted a step only about a foot long and gave a singular, mincing, ambling turn to her gait, would allow. Joy, convulsed with laughter, and Lalla, solemn and observant, followed her.

And then was Patience's wisdom proven, for David Batchelor came riding up to the gate, with little Reason before him on the pommel, and his big, gray horse shied wildly at sight of Sister Longanecker, who was dancing down the yard like a gigantic rag doll gone violently mad, quite oblivious to the figure she cut, and intent only upon securing her prey.

Joy's face was flushed with much suppressed mirth as she raised it to David's. "I want to leave the boy here with you," he said, "an 't please you, Mistress Joy. Sister Loving hath promised he should see the geese plucked. The post is in, and I am going to the settlement to bring back letters."

The story of poor Princess Lal and her downfall had not failed to touch David's generous heart. He expressed a belief upon hearing it that her father, or at least some of her friends or kindred, might have found refuge in Jamaica, and, having friends there, he decided he would write to make inquiries. David reminded Joy of these letters of his which had been written aboard the keel-boat but one day's travel out of New Orleans, and sent back by the rowers of a skiff. All had not gone to Jamaica. Some were addressed to friends in Florida. "And so," he said, "methinks 't is possible that I shall have news for little Shadow there when I return."

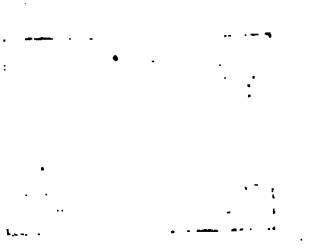
He handed down the laughing boy, who straightway ran cheering after Sister Longanecker, evidently considering her quite the most fascinating thing with which it had as yet been his good fortune to meet.

David laughed out suddenly and cantered off, as a great squalling broke forth just back of Joy. She turned to behold Sister Longanecker galloping buoyantly up, a goose under each arm, while little Reason, who had caught the flying ends of her waist scarf behind, "playing horse," must needs make his brief but enthusiastic legs fly if he would keep up.

"Shall I get a nightrail for you, Joy?" Sister Loving panted. " 'T would never do to spoil that pretty frock with feathers."

"Nay, that you shall not," answered Joy. "I will tie up my hair and watch you pluck awhile, but for myself—the geese may keep their feathers, for all of me."

"SISTER LONGANECKER GALLOPING BUOYANTLY UP, A GOOSE UNDER EACH ARM."



"Just like Patience," grumbled Sister Longanecker. "'T is so you foolish, sentimental maids all talk—afraid of giving pain. I pity any man who must depend on one of you to care for him."

"Yet my father hath not so far complained," murmured Joyce, demurely.

"Well, then, 't is because he is too near a saint to do so," retorted Sister Longanecker. "I vow he needs a woman's care, and doth not get it."

They were inside the room now. Sister Longanecker had taken a resentful goose in hand, and, with two fingers round its neck so that she might shut off at one and the same time its breath and its protesting shrieks, was proceeding to denude it of its feathers. Joy's head had been covered with a kerchief; little Reason, all pinned up in towels, bibs, and pinafores, was enjoying himself hugely.

"Watch de snow, Doyce. See de pitty snow!" he cried as each handful of feathers flew abroad.

"But truly, Sister Joyce," resumed Mistress Longanecker, insinuatingly, "to return now to that of which we were speaking. You will be wedding one of these days—what then will your poor father do?"

"Why, Mistress Longanecker," retorted Joy, laughing, "by your own telling of the story I am naught, and not fit to care for my father—how, then, should he miss me?"

"Nay, I meant not quite that; but think ye not he needs some one more lovinger, some older woman, now, of a more serious mind to understand him, like—you know?"

Joy opened her clear eyes very wide indeed, with a pretense of surprise. Poor Sister Loving—loving though she was in fact as well as in name—dared not pay quite open court to Father Tobias. But these times of hints and messages and suggestions as to her

father's loneliness were something which Joy remembered as far back as she could remember Sister Loving at all.

"Why, Sister Longanecker," she answered, "I think father doth very well without me. When I was away so long in New Orleans he seemed quite content."

"Nay, Mistress Joyce, that did he not. I saw it with my own eyes—he pined. Patience says to me the first week you were gone, 'Mommy,' she says, 'our dear pastor is a-pinin'. What is there that we can take him?' And I do think, Joyce," she continued, rather severely, "that I was over at your house every blessed day while you was gone, except them days your father was away on circuit."

"I knew that he had kind and loving friends here," answered Joyce; "those who would care for him, else had I scarce dared be away so long."

"Aw, the poor, dear man," returned Sister Longanecker, who was still vigorously at the goose, "and him that absent-minded he scarce knew whether he was eatin' pone-bread or the best pound-cake I could make for him—always so soft and tender, too—let go, ye villain!"

In the stress of her sentimental reminiscences, Sister Loving had relaxed her hold upon the gander's throat, and it had seized the opportunity—even a goose, it seems, will know an opportunity when one is put squarely before it—to catch the sister's thumb in its strong beak and pinch it well.

The geese were plucked, one after another, with much squalling and chasing and fluttering of feathers. They nipped Sister Longanecker when, sentiment getting the better of her vigilance, she slackened her grip on their necks. They eluded her and sailed the whole length of the room, fulminating wild squawks and

throwing up clouds of feathers, which made the small man shout with glee.

In the midst of all the uproar, when the fun was at the maddest, came David knocking at the door and asking for the child and Joy.

Patience would have denied him entrance. But little Reason, pulling the door out of her hand, shouted gaily to David to come in and see the pretty snow.

The last goose was at the moment in process of plucking. All the plucked fowls were huddled, angry and ashamed, down in one corner.

"Look, Dadie!" cried the child, "dey dot no kose on, an' her say"—pointing to Mistress Longanecker with a small, accusing finger—"'at her won't put no nighties on 'em. Is n't her wicked? Poor geeses!"

In her embarrassment, Mistress Longanecker let go the goose upon which she was then operating. The released fowl, Mistress Loving after it, fled shrieking toward the door, and therefore toward the party of spectators.

"Minerva and her bird," gasped David, his eyes dancing with laughter, as he drew Joyce outside.

They heard the goose caught, and the noise begin again. David had called her out to tell her that he had news that certain of Lalla's kindred were in Jamaica, and he hoped, after a few months, the child might go to them there.

"I think 't will be safe now," he said, "to send for the negress who came with her. My understanding is that both are free; or if the woman belongs to any one, it must have been to little Shadow's father."

He left, promising to write to the sisters the request that Zoombi be allowed to join the Princess Lal if the child should go through New Orleans on her way home. If it was thought well to send Zoombi up to Natchez, he would, he said, proffer money for her journey. Tak-

ing Reason up before him, he rode away toward "The Meadows," carrying with him also the squawking of the denuded geese and the rasping sound of Sister Loving's adjurations.

Mistress Wilful Guion stood in her kitchen garden gathering herbs for drying. At this time and place the herbs and simples of the garden played an important part in household supplies. There were lavender and marjoram for sweetness, with basil and rosemary beside; thyme and bay and chervil for seasoning; and boneset, camomile, and poppies for medical uses.

As she stood, her scant white skirts brushed the poppies' bells of shaken flame. It was a clear, warm evening in June. Baby airs dropped laughing over the hedge of Mistress Wilful's garden, pelted each other with great fistfuls of perfume, and played at hide-and-seek amid the blossoming mimosa. Humming-birds darted in and out with a soft whir of tiny wings. Life was keyed to a high, joyous pitch. The opulent gladness and beauty of a Southern summer-time rioted everywhere.

Only in the girl's wide, woeful eyes lay the shadow that sunshine could not lighten. Her filmy, lusterless black hair was loosened under the white sunbonnet. As she heard a horse approaching, she drew this latter down to hide the telltale redness of her eyes.

"Good even, Mistress Guion," called David's cheerful voice across the hedge; "I bring you a message—nay, 't is not a message, but information of which you may or may not be glad."

The girl looked up at the tall man with the laughing boy before him on his saddle, and the painful color flooded her wan face till it was deeply flushed.

"May Reasie have some pitty f'owers, p'ease?" cried the child. And David, dismounting, set the boy inside the hedge, while he himself stood close outside to speak to Wilful.

"What is your message? Is he coming back?" she whispered, putting her hands together and wringing them in her distress.

Batchelor nodded.

"Oh, I cannot bear it—if he come back. Once, already, have I been strong and sent him away. But if he come back again, what shall I do!"

"Nay, sister," returned Batchelor, much moved, and falling into a rare use of the Methodist form of address; "if you are weak, you know where to go for strength."

"My God!" broke out the tortured girl; "have I not prayed through long, weary nights, when sleep was denied me—have I not prayed? Oh, David Batchelor, what do you know? You, who are strong and good —and cold!"

David smiled a curious smile, which had the tenderness of a blessing and the sadness of tears. "Am I cold, think you, Mistress Wilful? Have I no heart to ache? Well, have it so."

She threw back her head, and laughed a little wildly. The white bonnet slipped from her disordered hair, and Batchelor saw for the first time the disarray of her whole appearance, the haggard, worn look of the sweet, young face.

"Hearts, Master Batchelor!" she cried, mockingly. "Have men hearts, too? And can they suffer so? Nay, I will never believe it."

Batchelor reached impulsively across the hedge, and caught the two little hands which she flung out in a gesture of dissent. They were like ice, and trembled in his own.

"Poor child, poor little one! 'T is the tenderest things life bruises most, methinks. And has it come to this, little sister? Has it gone so far?"

He looked off to the westering sun, and his blue eyes, direct and fearless, caught a glow from the warm sky.

There was a silence, and then, kind, infinitely compassionate, they came back to rest upon the white face near him.

"Hearts?" he repeated. "Aye, some of us. And, little one, hearts are troublesome, belike, for men as for women."

A sort of ashen horror settled down on the girl's tense features. "I do sometimes believe *he* hath no heart to trouble him. Oh, Master Batchelor, may I speak to you? I have no one to counsel with, and I am in sore trouble."

Without a word, David sought the gate, entered, and drew the trembling girl to a bench beneath a gnarled old plum-tree. "Now, Mistress Wilful, speak to me as freely as you will. Command me as you would command your own members. I will be hand and foot for you, and never a mind to judge you nor remember aught you would fain I should forget."

Then all the long repressed misery and terror in the poor child's mind burst forth. She told, in a few broken and almost incoherent sentences, of Burr's insidious encroachments from warm friend to passionate and declared lover, her humiliation that this love should be so openly spoken without formal declaration of his intentions. "He claims all and—and—offers nothing!" she sobbed.

"He has not presumed—he has not dared—"

"No, no! But if he offers to put no open affront upon me, neither does he offer to honor me. He talks of love, and love—oh, David, he talks so sweetly, I think an angel's voice could speak no sweeter than his voice when he talks of love. But there is no word of marriage, or the future. And I sometimes—"

She sprang up, and buried her face in her hands. Standing before him, a slim, shaken figure for which the moonlight and the sunset glow struggled, she half

sobbed, half whispered, "I love him so, David, that sometimes I am afraid I—I am afraid— Oh, I am sorely terrified!"

"Your mother," suggested David, with husky voice and swimming eyes.

"Speak not of her," interrupted poor Wilful. "She is so dotingly fond, he hath so beguiled her, that she oft reproaches me for my coldness to him, when my own heart is breaking and I feel I must be firm."

David rose and looked at her. She stood like a young martyr, straight and white, with the flaunting poppies ablaze at her feet.

She bent and crushed the glowing petals to her face, as though to steep her senses in the Lethe of their fateful odor. Plucking from their midst a long-stemmed handful, she raised them to her lips and held them toward him, saying, with a pitiful half-smile:

"See, here is forgetfulness, here is sleep—that sleep which hath forsworn my pillow. Oh, David," with a breaking sob, "I never sleep now. His face, filled with smiling, or proud and angry, or drowned and dead, swims between sleep and me."

"God!" from him who sat, big and strong, beside her, "no man 's worth it."

"Yes, David, it does; it swims between me and sleep, just as it swims between God and me when I try to pray. And, oh, I am afraid—so afraid—of what I may be tempted to— And here is forgetfulness."

"Nay, child," said David, a world of passionate pity in voice and eyes, as he took the crushed blossoms from her nerveless fingers and strewed them on the grass at her feet; "never that. 'T is medicine for a bruised body—I mind we bound them on my hand last spring when I had it crushed in the gin-wheel—but for a bruised spirit, for a wounded heart, never drug it. There is a medicine, there is a balm, but we can find

it only through pain, my poor dear—only through pain."

The ghost of that wan smile flickered again over Mistress Wilful's face. "Oh, think you not I have suffered enough to find it? Surely, I have suffered enough."

"Nay," said David, "there is one more pang; once more he will come; once more you must be strong. Are there—are there letters, writings of yours, in that man's possession? I have been told that when angered by resistance he makes cruel use of such."

Poor Wilful flinched, and crimsoned to the poppies' hue. "Can he—can any man—be so base?" she cried.

"He has such writings, then?" urged Batchelor. "You must have them from him again. Think of your good name."

"Ah," with a catch in her voice, "'t is past praying for, I fear. At best, 't is sadly blown upon. Is 't not so, Master Batchelor? Do not folk speak lightly of me?" And she studied his face with terror-stricken eyes—that face of such fathomless and impersonal kindliness. "My father used to say that when a maid's good name was soiled, nothing but churchyard mold could cleanse it. Churchyard mold—a brave shelter and oft I wish that I lay under it."

Reasie had found the old garden a world built for a boy's delight. His shrill pipe broke insistently into the evening stillness. His yellow curls were tossed about his heated face, as his ruthless baby feet trampled through the poppies and crushed their sleepy splendors into the earth. His grimy little hands reached forward for a floating butterfly adrift like a loosened petal on the scented air.

"Ho! de f'ower f'ied away. Det Reasie pitty f'ower," he cried. They stood among the glowing poppies, the child a sphered delight, the girl with life's

broken chalice at her feet, disillusioned youth incarnate; beside them, David's calm, protecting strength.

"Nay, nay," he protested, and again his firm, supple fingers shut hers close, and sent to the poor, cold, tired heart of the shaken girl a wave of hope and courage. "Dear little one, only we can befoul ourselves. We are but what we ourselves make us, and you—you little, fluttering, half-caged dove of purity"—he smiled into the dark, mournful eyes with a world of tenderness and faith—"the bars shall snap and you be free again. Foulness and thou, sweet Wilful Guion, are worlds apart. Be no more frightened. Meet the test but once again, and then—freedom, dear little child."

He stooped his towering, fair head and touched each little, cold, trembling hand with his warm, firm lips. Then he turned and left her standing amid her poppies, with a look of new-born courage in her face.

CHAPTER XXXI

HE power of the woman who has once cast a man off, flouted and scorned him is, if she choose to prove kind, easily resumed. Jessop, flung back upon himself, pushed, as it were, into the old life, drifted slowly but surely beneath Madame's influence. To stand still in his own strength was a thing denied him. Was he not traveling toward heaven? Then pitward at a quickstep.

He was wounded in spirit, his heart was sore, but, most of all, his vanity and self-esteem were abraded.

Madame, who had during his earlier acquaintance with her chosen to treat him as an inferior, now took quite another tone. She was at all times his admirer, his adoring suitor. Her house—and its atmosphere agreed with one phase of Jessop's development quite perfectly—was always open to him. He came and went unquestioned.

When there, it was shown him that his presence was much desired and delighted in; he was made the head and center of everything. But if he chose to absent himself, as he often did for weeks, he was not reproached nor made uncomfortable because of it. Most powerful of all, he was amply supplied with money.

Jessop's heart had failed him when he came to the point of writing home for funds. He could not ad-

dress the father whom he had disgraced, nor the brother who had dismissed him with such farewells as he flinched yet to remember. He compromised by writing to the Jews, to raise money on his very remote prospect of succession to the earldom. His elder brother, a man of powerful physique, was recently married, and these chances appeared so slight that, but for the nearer prospect of his family being some day hounded into paying his debts, it would seem unlikely any money whatever could be raised in that way.

Madame knew her spendthrift. She lined his pockets well. She left him free to take his pleasures, and bided her time. Three years before, when Jessop—then a raw boy, with three lives between him and an earldom—met her in New Orleans, she considered him worth plucking only for the modest patrimony he brought with him. Jessop himself, in the flush of his first love for her, talked marriage. The remembrance that she herself had at the time rejected such an idea gave her a sense of security now, when she desired to marry him.

But the Jessop of three years before and the Jessop of to-day—though he came back to her, glad to do so, and she was able to fan the embers of his passion into some little glow—were different men.

His life in Father Tobias's cabin, most of all his knowledge of Joyce Valentine and his love for her, had put something into his nature, or wakened something already there, with which Madame found, as time went on, she had to reckon.

About the middle of September he received a bulky package from London. His negotiations with the Jews had been unexpectedly and speedily successful. He sat in his own room alone, and spread his wealth upon the table before him. It would not have been Jessop's way to ask for a modest sum. What lay there

would repay Madame, and leave him enough to begin the purchase of that plantation at Natchez.

With the thought was brought up also the picture of Joy's face—not the haughty young beauty of the ball-room, not that queen of the revels coming down between the upraised swords, but the Joyce he had known back in Natchez—strong, true, tender, kind, and, above all, pure—pure with the limpid, untouched purity which a debauched man of the world rates higher than a good man would.

The money represented freedom—and Joy. He got up, pushed the papers into his pocket, and drew a long breath. The past months went dully before him. They seemed, in the reviewing, jumbled and unreal as a dream. He was like a man recovering from a fever. Surely he would go at once. He wondered at the triviality of the things which had held him from Joy so long.

His was a most uncautious temperament, and yet when he came to repay Madame and inform her that he was going away he used some caution. He had been made aware more than once what her present hopes were. He feared a scene if he informed her that it was now his determination to break with her forever, and so he merely announced his intention of visiting friends in the East for a time.

When she tearfully rejected the money, he pressed it laughingly upon her, suggesting that she be his banker for so much, adding that when he had once more lost his all he would come back for it.

Arrived at Natchez, a sudden timidity seized him. The stake began to appear so great that he feared to play out his hand.

After long hesitation, he went finally to David Batchelor. He did not desire that Joy should know he was in Natchez, but "The Meadows" was removed

a distance from Pastor Valentine's cabin, and he was able to have some long and serious conversations with Master Batchelor, without the news reaching any member of the Society.

David, while amused at Jessop's childlike ignoring of their last interview and the plainness of speech used then on both sides, met him kindly. He was generous as well as just, and these two qualities united to make him especially kind toward this wanderer returning to the beacon which had for so short a time lighted his way. Then, back in Batchelor's consciousness, though he realized it not at all, lay the conviction that he, David Batchelor, could here well afford generosity.

Jessop learned from him of Joy's course in offering to withdraw from the Society. He judged, from what David told him, that, while much changed, all that he loved best in her still remained—that she was, indeed, better suited to become his wife than she had been before. Three mornings the two men spent talking over these things, with little Reason playing at their feet or running out and in, to bring childish discoveries or treasures to David's notice.

Master Batchelor gave to the other every help which he would have given a beloved brother. One thing only he refused, and that was to accept the office of ambassador.

"Nay, Major Jessop," he repeated, "Joyce Valentine could never love a coward. You must e'en face your fate, and 'dree your weird,' whatever it may be."

"I know—I know she would not," Jessop agreed, and declared that he would go on the morrow.

After he left New Orleans, Madame, whose thoughts were much engrossed with that which was now her all engrossing scheme, received letters from certain friends of hers in England, advising her of the death,

without issue, of Jessop's brother. The old father, too, lay very ill. Any hour might see him pass away.

She knew her plans ruined if this knowledge came to Jessop before she should have persuaded and cajoled him into that marriage with herself which he had once so much desired and she had denied him. The cadet of a noble house might marry a woman of her sort. She seriously doubted that Jessop, once come into his title, would consider it at all.

She sent to his hotel, as he, when at her house, often sent, and secured such letters as had accumulated for him. These, opened, brought her even later information than her own. The earl was dead. Jessop had succeeded to the title.

Now, it occurred to her that at such news as this 'Sieur Valentine's niece might once more take the field. It was worth while, she thought, to make a journey up the river.

She would warn the girl that Jessop was already wedded; or, that story failing, try to work upon her sympathies, posing as a deserted and heart-broken woman. So that when Jessop set forth that morning in early October for the little cabin by the river, Madame was moving toward the same goal.

His feelings were much mingled as his feet carried him along the old familiar path. He was ashamed, he was afraid; and yet, now that his face was set toward Joyce, toward purity and honest love and all she stood for to his wayward heart, there fell on his soul a great peace.

He was curiously like a school-boy going home to be reproved, but, as he trusted, taken into loving arms once more. Joy's strength, her faithful courage and patient mastery of herself, her brave, undying hopefulness, endeared her to him, and, even more than her beauty, made him long for her.

There were changes in the outer aspect of the cabin,

which he was too preoccupied to note as he stepped inside the gate.

Joy, all in white—the selfsame Joy —her bright hair ruffled above that serene brow of hers, came to the open door. She looked at him, and her lips even were drained of color.

Joy's face was always pale, with a sweet, warm whiteness which belonged to its beauty.

He halted a pace from the door; she put her hand up to its lintel to steady herself, and these two, who had been so much to each other, stood for one long, desolate moment confronted in silence.

'T was the man who spoke first. "I have come back, Joy," he said, in a sort of undertone.

"Yes," she answered, as low; "why did you so?"

He came toward her, and attempted to take her hand. "Why did I, dear heart?" he whispered. "Because I love you."

"Not here," she cried, a little wildly, "not in my father's house! I will not hear such words as these where he is."

"I must talk to you, Joy," urged Jessop, humbly. "You would never condemn unheard—not even the greatest criminal."

"Out under the free sky, then," she answered him; "not in this place. Yes, I will hear you, Master Jessop." She struggled for composure. "I was going, but now, to the grove for autumn leaves and berries. Come, an 't please you. We can talk there."

Lalla, who had been provided with a basket for the excursion of which Joy spoke, followed, and together they went in almost complete silence down the little winding path into the beech grove.

Brilliant leaves already carpeted the ground, but the branches above were still clad in their valiant autumn livery.

The season spoke to Jessop of Joyce Valentine; even

so would she meet disaster, defeat, death itself, with colors flying, with all her beauty brought well to the front, and brave and strong and glorious to the last.

Joy stood bareheaded under the glowing branches in the splendid wood.

The child, pushing her basket close, asked: "Will Madonna reach those tall boughs for me now? Then I will get the berries."

Joy turned absently, forgetful of Jessop's presence, and began breaking those beautiful bouquet-like branch-ends of the sour-wood, which run from winey red to softest rose.

When the basket was piled high she stopped, a great crimson spray still in her fingers, and turned quietly to Jessop. "You may speak now," she said, "if you have aught to say to me."

Her tone was quite passionless and calm. The thing which shook Jessop's heart with terror was that it was almost kind.

"What is it, Joy?" he began feverishly. "What is this thing which hath come between thee and me? Where did I miss the road to thy heart? I thought I knew it once. If I have been in error, set me right. In mercy set me right, I pray you."

"I met Madame Jessop when I was in New Orleans. I saw you with her at the theater," said Joy, abruptly.

A great relief appeared in Jessop's face. "Was that all, sweetheart?" he inquired. "Was 't there the cloud began to form between us? Nay, dear, there is no Madame Jessop, but I am very fain that there should be a Mistress Jessop, and that soon."

"I saw you with her at the theater," repeated Joyce.

Jessop shrugged his shoulders. "She belongs to the past, Joy," he said. "I had many friends before I met you—whom—I would not that my wife should know."

He pronounced the words "my wife" proudly and tenderly, but Joyce was, to her own surprise, curiously unmoved by them.

Suddenly, in the midst of his urgency, there came before the man a picture of the pitiful figure he cut in it all.

" 'T is husks that I am offering you, my dear," he said humbly; "you who have stores of garnered grain; but Joy, dear Joy, your love could make me anything."

"Yea, could it?" asked Joy, thoughtfully. "It hath not done so in the past, meseems. And now, to be quite honest with you, I do think I have no love—such as you ask—to give you."

"In the past?" echoed Jessop. "But then were you not my wife. With you always at my side—O Joy, with you!—I should never be tempted; or, being tempted, I should never fall from what is best and highest in me. Dear, can you forgive the past—an ugly, sinful, hateful past?"

Joy turned to him, and put out both her hands. "Why, yes," she said, "right heartily; if I have aught to forgive, being myself a sinful creature, I can forgive it you."

The calm frankness of her tone struck cold on Jessop's passionate mood. "A sinful creature? Nay, you are an angel, and had I you beside me, life were heaven."

The old, maternal feeling, which was, after all, the base of Joy's affection for the man, swelled in her heart as she looked at him. He watched her face, and, "Joy," he cried jealously, "those who really love do not forgive so easily!"

"Am I too kind?" she asked, smiling a little. " 'T is true, then, that I do not love you; but well I know I wish you every good."

"Will you marry me?" he questioned fiercely, catch-

ing her wrist, and looking into her eyes. "Do you mean that? Or is it that you will cast me back into that mire from which you plucked me? Oh, women are all alike! You have seen things finer, to your thinking, and now the man you once cajoled may wend to hell for aught you care!"

Joy regarded him gravely. "If your salvation appears to you to depend upon an imperfect creature like myself," she said, "you are in great error. I wish you well. I might even say I love you; at least, I love the memory of what hath been between us, but—"

"Oh, do not say it!" broke in Jessop's anguished tones. "Forgive me, Joy! I am a soul in torment. You cannot expect smooth speeches from the damned."

CHAPTER XXXII

HILE poor Jessop pleaded with Joyce his cause—a cause which, after all, was perhaps prejudged, and sentence already passed—while he brought forward every argument and invoked every aid his love could suggest, a skiff with white awning and six black rowers drew up to the little creek landing by Father Tobias's cabin. From it there stepped a figure which appeared wildly out of place in that rude, homely setting. It was that of a woman whose beauty was great, though not youthful. Her gown of gay brocade was stiff with bullion broideries, work of the chilly fingers of patient nuns. Her powdered hair was raised high over a cushion. Her square-cut gown showed the white neck and bosom, with a bare shadowing of lace tucker. She was dressed as for a rout. For added stateliness, she had wrapped a great furred mantle about her, and she carried a tall, lacquered, beribboned cane.

As she came trailing her magnificence up to Father Tobias's door, the old man stared at her—and well he might—half thinking her the idle fantasy of a dream. He paused, with his finger in the book he had been reading as he sat there under the great beech-trees, and rising, bowed and asked if he could serve her.

"This is, methinks," she said, with a most ingratiating smile, "Master Tobias Valentine. Nay, sir I do

not care to sit; rather will I stand here until I find whether I may have speech with Mistress Valentine. 'T is she I seek."

The old man called Zette, and Zette informed them that Mistress Joy had gone with a servant to the grove to gather leaves and flowers for dressing the house. Something in the woman's appearance aroused the negress's antagonism. "If ze lady," she suggested, "will go up in her boat a li'l' way, she fin' ze bayou. Dass where Missie Joyous iss. Unless she lak to wait here?"

The lady was as little willing to wait as Zette was desirous to have her do so. Calling her attendant, a great, gaunt negress all in white, she returned to her boat, and so on up the stream and out of sight.

Joy's heart, so tender where this man was in question, still held back from the ultimate pain of a complete rejection. Her eyes were so pitying, her very silence so ruthful, that Jessop hoped he might be winning back something of what he had once believed his.

As Madame came upon these two, standing like lovers in the glowing wood, her wrath flared up mightily. Jessop was here, then. Her errand was, as it appeared to her, all in vain. This creature whom she had robbed both of his money and his honor, whom she had had at call like any spaniel, was daring now to choose for himself a wife.

Well, let him so. As for herself, she was dead weary of the part which she had played. She crossed her hands upon the cane and stood, with sneering lips, regarding them. The patch set below the rouge upon her cheek flaunted the skull and crossed bones of the pirate flag. It was her humor thus at times to glory in the shame of that early pirate lover of hers. The ensign well suited her. She was a pirate upon the land, even as he had been upon the high seas. Now

she decided, having failed, to carry all off with a high hand.

"So!" she cried, in her clear, ringing voice. "My Lord Edward Montfalcon a'Jessop, Earl of Shropshire, I am too late. I came up to this place to intercede with this young damsel upon your behalf. I perceive that a mightier than I—even l'Amour himself—hath pleaded your cause."

Jessop and Joy both turned. Joy saw the woman she had known as Madame Jessop. Jessop answered the newcomer coldly. "You give me strange titles," he said. "What brings you here?"

And now the woman's cheek needed no rouge. "I give you your own," she replied. "And mind you," she added, "ye silly, mawkish boy, not fit to thread my shoe, who hint that I come after you because of love—mind you, I say, 't is the earldom I fain would have wedded, not thee. Miss, here, may have thee and thy foolish *beaux yeux*, and welcome. 'T is thy title and wealth tempted me for a little."

As she stood there and sneered, tall, beautiful, and above all, where Jessop was concerned, strong and self-poised, he felt that, if Joy should cast him off, he would go back to this woman. Poor Jessop! he must always be Edward Jessop—plus some one else! If it could not be his good angel, why, then, room there for the spread of his bad angel's wings! He had a mountain of belief in fate, chance, fortune, circumstance, the good or evil which might be portioned out to him by the hand of another, and not one grain of faith in his own ability to choose for himself what manner of man he would be, what life he would lead.

Something of this Joy felt, and the old protecting instinct, always strong in her where Jessop was concerned, was roused by it. Almost she wavered. He was so weak; he needed her so much.

"Yea, 't was the earldom," reiterated Madame. "'T is in my blood, methinks, to honor it. You believed, perchance, that when you met me three years agone, you met me then for the first time?"

"I had seen you in London. Have done with this! Did you break open my letters? Is my father indeed dead?" returned Jessop.

"Aye, you had seen me in London, on the dirty boards of a theater, where I would not have shown my face except that there I kept the run of all the gallants worth my notice."

"Is the old man gone, then?" Jessop inquired again, suddenly and huskily, as though the knowledge had just come home to him. "Would that he might have lived to see me amend my faults! If that he be indeed gone, the more reason that I must now strive to live as his son should."

"Yea, is he gone—and Alfred, too; you are, as I have called you, earl. And I was born, look you, my Jessop, at your park gates. My father—and my father's father—belonged to the soil your fathers owned. 'T is strange how such things cling. Much as I have seen, it ever seems a greater thing to me to go back—to that home which flung me out—as Countess of Shropshire than as Queen of England!"

Jessop stood looking moodily down upon the scattered autumn brilliance at his feet. Of his father's death he had expected to hear at any moment; Alfred had been cold and unloving always; both had disowned him long since; yet, at the thought that he was now utterly alone, there came sadness.

"That you may surely know," taunted Madame, "'t was not for yourself but for your title I did follow you—why, look you: while Alfred lived I would not wed you—not I! Aye, mistress," turning to Joyce, "belike he hath not told you so, but 't is true. I

changed my mind only when I learned of Alfred's mortal sickness."

"When knew you of it?" inquired Jessop.

Madame laughed exultingly. "Months gone," she cried. "Oh, you were out of the family councils, but I was in them. I wrote the old man, when your last cent was gone, telling who I was and that we were soon to wed. Aye, that wrung his pride—and brought the money he would surely have denied to you. 'T was better worth my while to throw you over, my lord, and to be bought so to do from month to month, than 't was to wed you."

"Have you done?" asked Jessop, sternly. "Will you begone now? This lady here and I were speaking, when you came, of most important matters."

Madame burst into jarring laughter. "I warrant me you were! Hast thou converted him, mistress? Is he become a Methody as yet? Yea, turn your back on me. He is a sweet, attractive sinner, and a man—I but an erring woman."

"If there were aught that I could do or say—" began Joy, in a troubled tone.

"Nay," snarled Madame, "you will never make a Methody of me. The old Church is good enough for my sort. 'T is like our mothers to us. We cannot fall so low but that its arms are still under us. It christens us; it buries us, however vile we be. God's blood!" she burst out angrily, "a curse upon you and your Methody whining, that set me talking here of death!"

Jessop drew Joy away. The woman looked after them with haggard eyes, in which there were some tears. "'T is not his love I grudge her," she muttered; "'t is not his love, God wot—nor is 't himself! 'T is that she can love again—that she can desire his love."

She regarded the two youthful figures, moving together down the aisles of the richly colored wood. "God—O God!" she wailed. "To be young again like that! Not only to be loved, but to be loving!"

She shuddered, and drew her great furred and hooded mantle round her. Then, with bent head, she took her way to the boat which waited for her.

"I will go home—there I can forget it."

She hurried down to the water's edge, looking neither to the right nor to the left, her head held low and her rich silks trailing after her.

Zoombi followed sullenly. She had not been able to see her princess, and she began to fear that she was going to be taken away without one glimpse.

Had Madame not been so preoccupied with her chagrin, she would have seen the child's thin, little black face peering at her from behind a tree-trunk almost at the water's edge.

The rowers, having been told that the lady would not be in haste to return, had taken the opportunity to go further up-stream on some errand of their own. Madame swore roundly as she searched the empty waste of waters for them.

Stepping out on a tussock of grass which reached into the shallow water at the stream's edge, she leaned forward and gazed up and down the river. "Hang the black rascals! Were they mine, I 'd cut them half to pieces for such doings," she muttered.

Zoombi saw her princess now. Lal was bending round from behind the sheltering tree-trunk, making Masonic signals to her old slave.

She pointed to Madame, frowned, pointed again, and then, while Zoombi still hung stupidly staring, unable to grasp her highness's meaning, the child slipped out, stole softly up behind Madame, bent, clutched the woman's ankles, and dragged her down.

"Now, Zoombi!" she cried. She need not have called. The other, with that quick instinct of the savage which recognizes deeds though it be dull to words or signs, flung herself promptly upon the prostrate and writhing woman.

Madame was strong, there were people within easy earshot; yet these two poor exiles, whom she had flouted, whom she had shamed and degraded without fear of any reprisals, held her down.

The sense of wrongs long borne gave might to the two black creatures. They saw in her the incarnation of that fate which had shut them out from home and kindred. Still she struggled, and still they held her, strangled, drowned in six inches of muddy water as stained, as foul as was the thing it but half concealed.

"Push her out into the stream, Zoombi. Let her go back home," whispered Lalla, hoarsely, when the prostrate woman lay at last quite still.

Zoombi stooped to the drenched form; a black finger plucked at the jewels on delicate hand and ear.

"You shall not!" cried the child. "I am a king's daughter, and I do not steal." Which bit of royal honor probably saved the lives of both blacks, as, with the jewels in their possession, the murder must inevitably have been brought home to them.

Zoombi obediently slipped back the ring which she had half withdrawn from the dead woman's finger. She pushed the body, first with her foot and then with a sapling, out into the current, that the stream might take it.

Madame's rowers, a little later, gave scarce a thought to Zoombi's explanation that her mistress would not return with them, but would walk back to the cabin, and, remaining there, take the keel-boat as it passed.

Among those who frequented her house, and the servants in it, were none to set on foot earnest inquiry for

Madame's whereabouts. She might take her own time for her returning.

Nobody was surprised that Madame should go on, leaving Zoombi behind to accompany Lalla to Jamaica —indeed this was what the sisters had requested, and what she had given an unwilling half promise to do. Mother Clemence had taken the precaution, when she heard that Madame was going up to Natchez, of advising Joy; and though the letter was delayed, it confirmed, when it came, Lal's triumphant announcement to Joy and David. "I have Zoombi back now. The white devil hath gone home without her."

When time brought good news of Lalla's friends, Zoombi and the child, sent by David Batchelor's kindness, went together to their own place, forever unsuspected of the murder and forever unrepentant of it.

Neither unpremeditated criminal thought of weights, so Madame was not handicapped going home. The stiff, unyielding mud clutched and clogged her for a time, but at last, at last she rose, a ghastly thing, and floated back whence she came.

The white face, with its dark hair all unloosed about it, was turned upward, sometimes to flaming suns which did not vex her quiet eyes at all, and sometimes to high, vast, black night skies, all filled with solemn stars which watched her like accusing eyes. Cranes dipped and screamed above her, the water-fowl flew over. With the dark, bats came—hideous creatures of the nightfall—and, with a whir of naked wings, swooped to the water, peered into the dead face, with its awful, sightless, staring eyes, and sped affrighted. She who had been ever swift, eager to reach the bourn for which she strove, dallied long upon the bosom of the torpid, heavy stream. She rested whole days in reed patches, did Madame, on this last journey.

Out in midstream the great, brutish current bore

onward like a bull. But Madame's progress was slower than the shifty, creeping water of the stream's edge. Yet it was sure. And the big, foul stream which muddies all it touches, muddied her and tossed her and wrecked her beauty, but at last it carried her home.

LEFT alone with Joy, Jessop made one more trial of his fate.

"Now," he said, and his piteous tone was more moving to her than any fiery, passionate protestations—"now, dear heart, you know the worst of me. This woman bore my name for three shameful years. My wife she never was. 'T was only, dear," he hastened to add, in eager honesty, "because she did not choose to be. I would have wedded her at any time she had said the word. She preferred to take me, young fool that I was, to empty me of all the wealth I had, and, shaking out the last penny, fling me aside. 'T was then, dear, I drifted here into the wilderness and found you, my Joy."

"You offered her," said Joy, thoughtfully, "just what you offer me."

Jessop flung himself on his knees before her and caught a fold of her dress with an impulsive, protesting hand. His face, upraised to hers, was pale and ardent.

"Nay, never say it," he besought; "she had naught from me which I would offer you. All that is best and purest and most manly in me—'t is not much, but what there is of good—I do not offer it to you—you have it. It is yours. You do create it, love. Say yes," he added, in a passionate whisper. "My heart's delight, say yes."

Joy would have been more than mortal if the lofty title and estates which Madame had announced had not in her eyes added some luster to the charm of this man, whom she already held tenderly in her heart. Her

brief glimpse of his world had taught her something of what such station means. She knew now that she loved these things which he could give her—but did she love him? Almost she thought so.

Down the dim aisle of the wood beyond came David's tall figure. He was singing in an undertone, his hound at heel, the image of poised, contented manhood. Her heart answered her.

Jessop turned his head, never moving from his attitude of supplication. Batchelor well knew the whole affair. No need to bar him out. Something in Joy's eyes beckoned the on-coming man, and he went forward till he stood beside her. There had been no word as yet of actual love between them, no question asked and answered. But, as he paused beside her, Joy said, and knew that she was safe in the saying: "Nay, friend; my choice is here."

Jessop rose silently. It seemed strange to him now that he had never thought of this. These two stood for the highest spiritual reach of his life.

As he faced them there, the splendors of the autumn wood above, about, beneath them, it seemed to him—but for the aching of his own heart he would have been glad that it was so—that God himself had mated them.

The man was strength in repose, inexhaustible patience and courage and faith to respond to her every demand.

Joy was creative energy, the force in action, strong no less, but from the nature of her strength requiring his.

Jessop lifted his hat, and the beating sun fell full upon his drawn, white face. "Had you told me of this sooner, Mistress Joy," he said, with the first bitterness he had shown, "it had spared me some pain and been, methinks, more like your old, kind self."

"Believe me, Master Jessop," Joy answered, "you do

"DOWN THE DIM AISLE OF THE WOOD BEYOND CAME DAVID'S TALL FIGURE."

me wrong. 'T is but now I knew it, and scarce do I know it now."

She turned, and mutely sent a question from her own fearless eyes to David's. He gave her back a smile.

"Aye, is it so?" asked Jessop, wearily. Then, as if remembering that there were courtesies to be observed, "A wise choice, Mistress Joy," he said; "a wise choice, David Batchelor." And, after a long, heartsick pause, "God bless you both."

WERE Joyce and David married? Do the rivers run into the sea? Does spring follow, after winter is over? In short, do the things which God has ordained come to pass?

And were they happy? Is there any bliss for the river like that of losing itself in the sea? Is there any joy for the ocean which can equal that of receiving in its bosom the sweetness and freshness of the stream? Can you not feel in the annual spring miracle the titanic gladness of earth herself?

That day upon which Father Tobias rose in the little meeting-house amid the cane-brakes to make this twain one was not to them only a day to mark with a white stone. The old man had called David his spiritual son; this day was to make him a son indeed. The tears were upon his saintly face, and upon the face of many another, as he pronounced them man and wife.

It was not till years afterward that the great church whose foundation stones were laid by many such bands as this one, there in the wilderness—the church which has mothers where others have church fathers—overtook these two pioneers upon the path of progressive thought, and absorbed them into itself.

Long before that day, there had come happy news to them from over seas of one who believed, and no doubt

truly, that the knowing of them both had made him a better and in the end, therefore, a happier man.

Aaron Burr's arrest for treason followed a later conspiracy. And she who had loved him? A quaint, little-read old history of that time tells us that during his latest visit to the "Half-way House," finding the maiden purity of the girl whom he undoubtedly loved invincible, he proposed marriage. Nor did he give her up until, a fugitive from the government he had despised, he wrote from abroad to release her.

His after story is well known. As to hers, we read upon the yellowed page that the hotel in which she lay, when in after time she visited Havana, was mobbed by those desiring to behold such famous beauty, and that the crowd could not be dispersed till she had graciously greeted them from an upper balcony.

After that, we are told that "she married a very worthy gentleman of Savannah, a man of substance and family." And then, no more, for the happy have no history.

The descendants of the house of Valentine—children of Luis and of younger brothers, and the sons and daughters of Madeleine and Ausite, who did not, of course, bear the name of Valentine—still form a mighty clan in the *vieu carre*.

Neville entered the priesthood in the flower of his youth. His attachment to Joyce Valentine was unbroken to the day of his death. A poet, he apotheosized that boyish passion and carried it, a thing divine, into the life of a Catholic priest. Passed through the alembic of his crystal soul, the love of woman became an active principle for good.

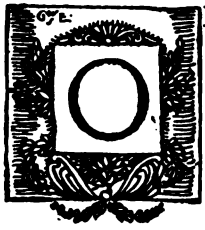
He died, a very old man, during the yellow-fever epidemic of 1854. A tablet in the cathedral records the good deeds of his many and blessed years.

The idea for which Father Tobias labored has waxed

and grown. The broader acceptance of it, for which his son and daughter strove, has become to-day the thing itself.

Two such beings as Joyce Valentine and David Batchelor could not pursue mere personal happiness. Both were, along different lines, reaching forward for the common weal. And both found not only the individual bliss we all crave, but that which one of earth's wisest has called "a higher than happiness, which is blessedness."

EPILOGUE



NCE more a river moving like a mighty sea. But now, resistless, unfathomable, it urges on toward the open ocean of eternity a flood of years, and not of waters.

And still, moving a helpless speck upon its breast, the boat, and in the boat three figures—the Past, the Present, and the Future.

Crouching at the shallop's end, his keen eyes on the slipping tide beneath him, the Indian, type of a vanishing race, symbol of the things that were.

At the boat's prow, the strong man, bravely accepting life, and living it from day to day—a noble Present.

Then, that one other, figure of what shall be—the child, the girl, the woman with the mother's heart. Loving, tender, and faithful, yet restless, fiery, creative—to such belong the future. They shall come down the stream of time, diffusing everywhere their own pure light of truth, high courage, freedom.

And still the flood bears on always to better things. The East is red with promise. All her billowed clouds are sacks of minted gold to buy in a good time what yet the heart of man hath not conceived—the glorious heritage of the future.

And day dawns upon the wanderers in a far land.

[redacted]